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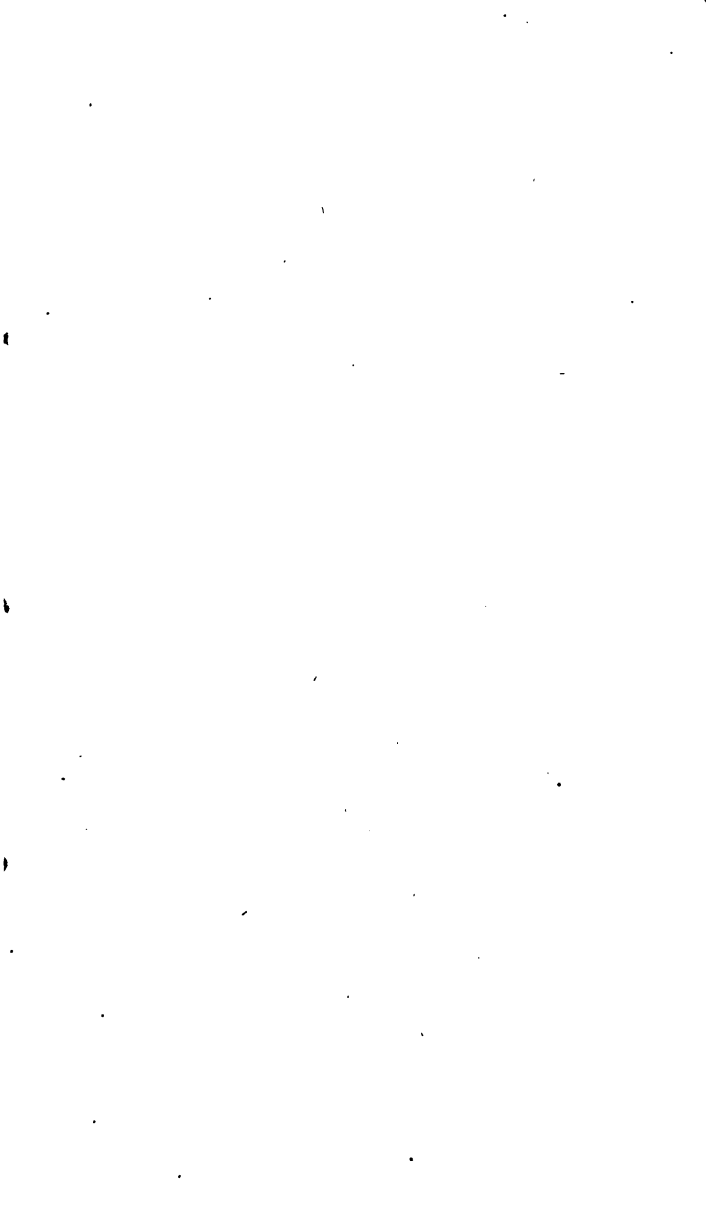
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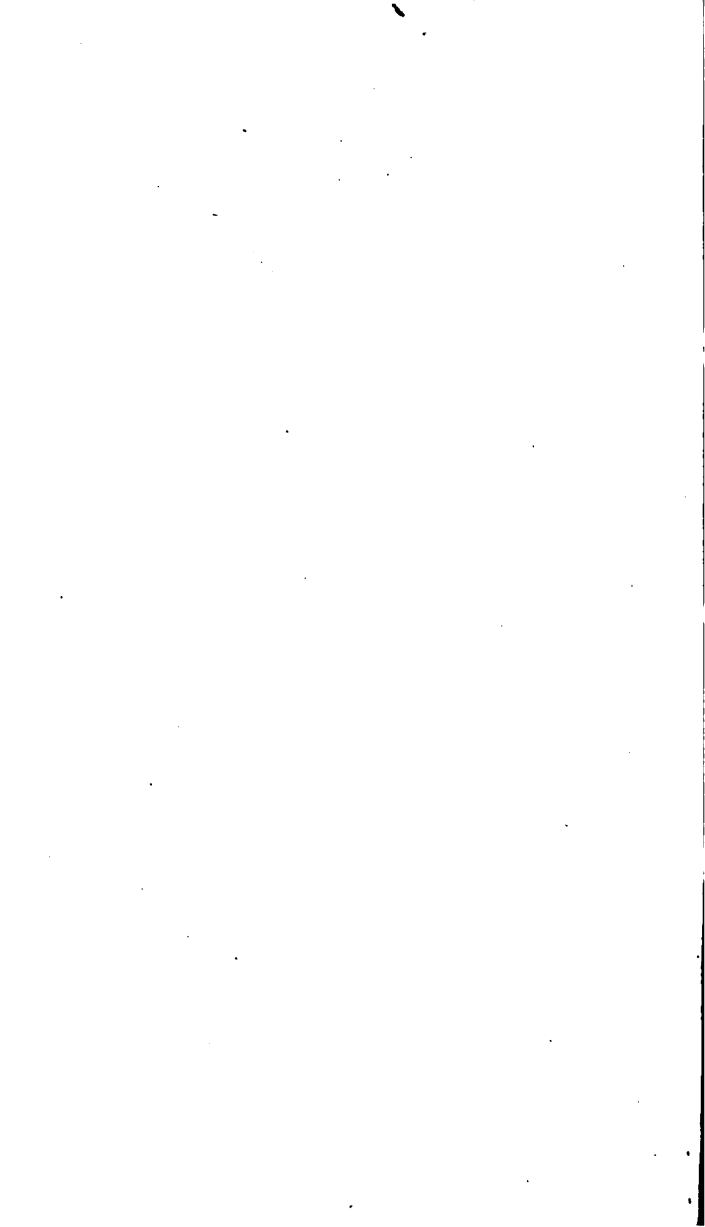
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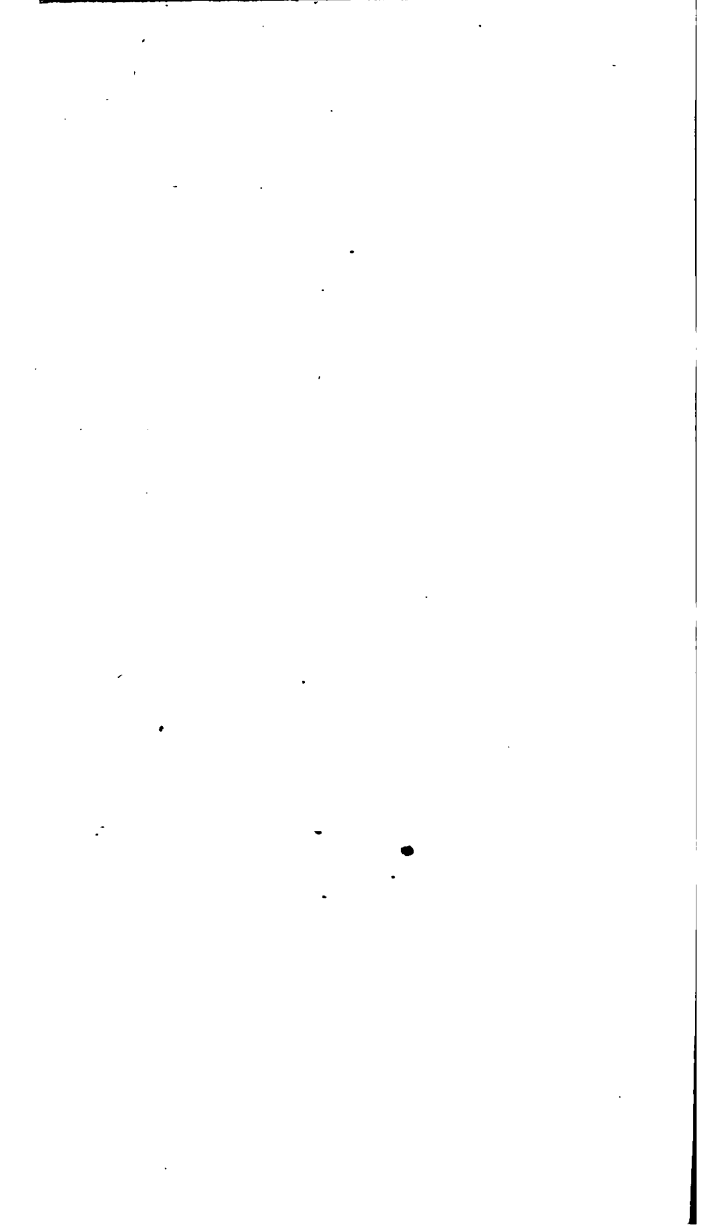
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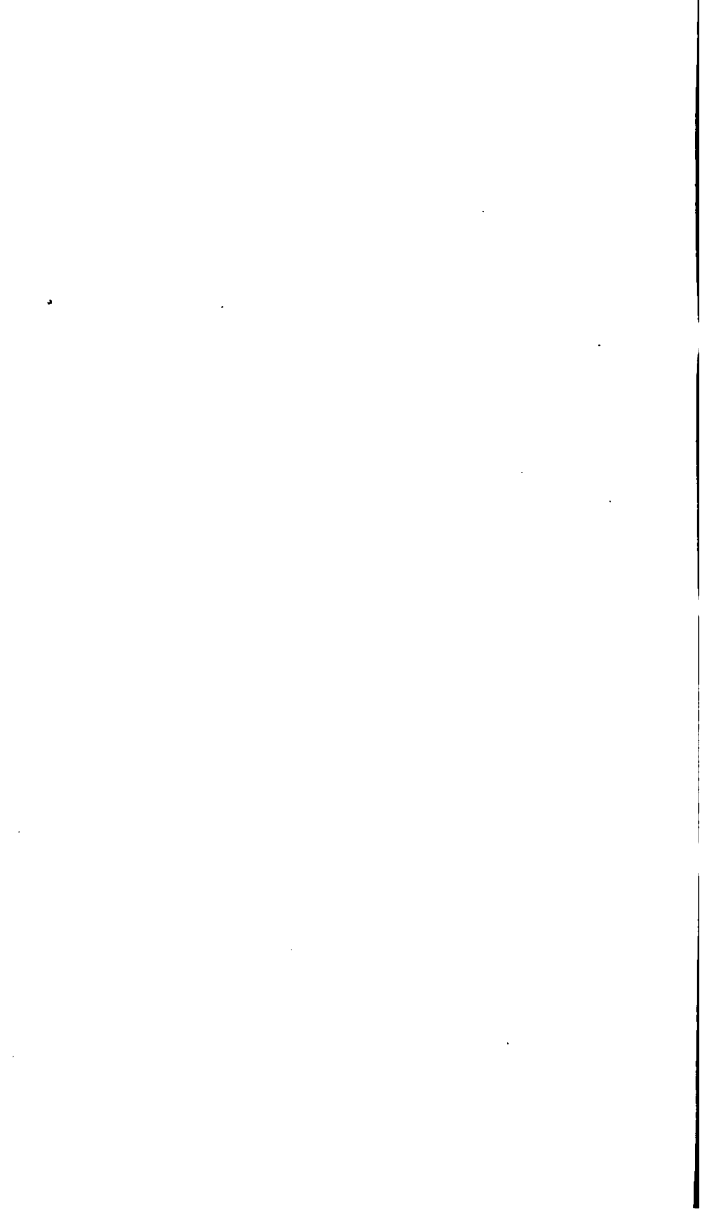


for dear Emily
from Dad.

Love



THE
STAR IN THE DESERT.



THE
STAR IN THE DESERT;

BY
THE AUTHOR
OF
A TRAP TO CATCH A SUNBEAM,
OLD JOLLIFFE,
THE CLOUD WITH THE SILVER LINING,
&c.

by
Mrs. Matilda Anne (Planché) Mackenzie.

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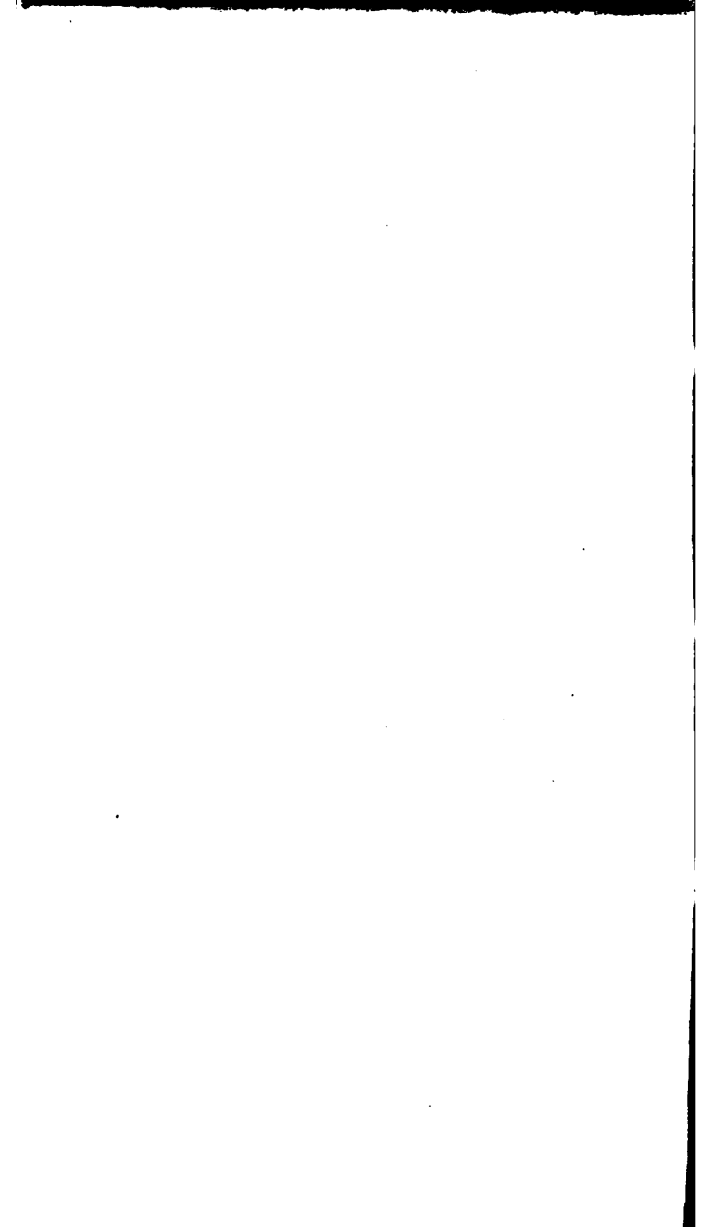
TO

MY DEAR FATHER

This Little Tale

IS DEDICATED BY

HIS AFFECTIONATE CHILD.



THE STAR IN THE DESERT.

"It's coming on to blow — and such a keen cold wind, Will dear, do have it on?"

"Well! go on then, only make haste," and the little round fat woman, thus replied to, stood on tip-toe and wound a worsted handkerchief about the neck of her husband; receiving in return a salute, which echoed through the small room.

"Now then, old girl, my whip and gloves; that's right — you're a regular trum — God bless you, — home to supper, a good one, mind. What's it to be, eh?"

"You go away and don't ask questions, Sir, don't I always give you a good one?"

"You do, you do, good bye," and with one more hearty kiss, the husband departed; his little wife watching him, till at the end of the long lane, through which he rode, he and his pony looked a mere speck: then, with a slight shudder at the cold, she re-entered the little

room, which served them for parlour and kitchen, and making up the fire, sat down to work.

Will Davis and his wife might well have earned the flitch of bacon ; for a more loving, affectionate couple never lived. They were cited as examples for miles round, and the wish bestowed on every youthful couple was, that they might be as happy as the Davises.

They kept the pretty vine-covered lodge of a large mansion, standing in one of England's beautiful Southern Counties, Will acting as head gardener to the rich owner. His own rough, honest face, and the fat, rosy, dimpled one of his wife, bespoke their measureless content, and told of their calm, regular, happy life. One little tiny charge, some three months old, was all that divided Lucy's heart with her husband, to whom it bore a ludicrous resemblance ; and with a good salary, and this pretty home, they would have been puzzled, as Lucy often said, to think of any thing they wanted. How strange and sad the contrast between that ' rich owner ' and themselves.

With a large establishment of servants, he lived alone in that great house ; a young man too, but some thirty years had passed over his head, and yet the world and its gaieties appeared to have no charms for him,—seldom was a

smile seen on his handsome face. I say handsome, but there was an expression in it, which marred its beauty; a painful expression on any face, much more on a young one: and those who knew him well, said it was the true index of his mind,—expressed but too well the fact that he had no Belief.

He called himself a Philosopher!—and tried to shut out from his soul the Light, which could alone guide him in safety through this world's shoals and quicksands. He had forged for himself fetters of iron, which were a burdensome weight to carry; and truly, that man, favoured alike by nature and fortune, stood there an object alone of pity, for his soul was dark within him.

But few, very few, knew the story of his life, or guessed at the reason of his gloom and retirement; and only wondered that one so rich and prosperous should seem so sad. But he had wilfully shut out from him all that was bright and loving in this world, and he believed in no other. His indomitable pride—pride of birth and distinction, pride which opposed itself against advice from any one, and led him obstinately to pursue the bent of his own inclination—had also helped to make him wretched and lonely, and he lived in that stately home less to be envied than the poorest man on his estate.

Notwithstanding his strange opinions and way of life, all in the neighbourhood spoke well of him; for to all he was kind and courteous,—a thorough gentleman—the peasant girl received as much respect from him as the titled lady, no provocation ever drew from him a harsh or angry word, and his butler had strict injunctions never to send away unassisted or unheard, any poor applicant who came to his door; but he could never be induced to help one more than another, never would listen to assurances that one was better than another, and deserved more to be assisted; any mention of goodness served but to summon to his lip a cold satirical smile, and all detraction the same reply, — “they are all alike; — if they’re in need, help them.” Such was the character of Sir Arthur Atherstone, honest Will Davis’s master.

But we have left Will trotting on his pony down the long lane; it had a turning, like most long lanes, and that brought him on to a high road, with a low hedge on either side, and a magnificent view commanding a wide extent of country, with a peep at the deep blue sea, now sparkling in the light of the noon-day sun, which gleaming on the swelling sails of some vessel, made it look like a white bird with expanded wings floating on the glistening waters.

Will, next to his wife and child, loved his pony, and on these journies into the neighbouring town, where she carried him so bravely about once a fortnight — and indeed whenever he mounted her — he made a practice of enlivening the road by conversing with her; and Jenny would prick up her ears and lift up her feet, and trot away with him as fast again at the first sound of his cheerful voice.

“So ho, my little woman,” he said, as he turned on to the road aforesaid, — “now for it, go away with you — if there ever was a sieve of corn waiting for a pony, there is one to-day at the Rising Sun for you — now then, what *are* you looking at? — you’ve lived all this time in the world and not know a milestone when you see it, — five miles and a half before there’s a hope of that corn, so now I tell you. — You stupid I’m not going down there — Oh! yes, very fine indeed, so you thought you were only going to Firley, did you? — Oh! hav’n’t you made a mistake — I say, if you go at such a pace you’ll be there before I shall, I know you will, you jade you. I’m much obliged to you, but this is not the Rising Sun,” he continued, as the little animal attempted to stop before a small road-side inn, beneath the porch of which the fat landlord was smoking a quiet pipe; but he let her have her way as he mostly did, and

laying the reins on her neck, allowed her to walk to the horse-trough and dip her nose in the fresh water.

"Good morrow, Master Davis," said mine host, in a rich oily voice which seemed to come out of his large double chin.

"How's yourself, Master Snelling?"

"Hearty, Sir, hearty, — glass of home-brewed, eh? — cold morning."

"Well, I don't mind if I do — your fault Jenny — mem. one feed less."

The landlord rolled into the bar and soon came out panting, with a foaming horn of ale. With a nod of the head, which meant many a good wish, Will tossed it off, paid his reckoning, and was soon going again at a brisk trot along the road.

"Well, I would stare at that now Jenny, never saw an old woman in a red cloak did you? — Holloa," he called out, pulling up as he came near her, "how are you, Dame."

"Eh, who is it?" she asked, shading her eyes, and looking up at him. "Oh, Master Davis, how be you, my eyes is so bad, I scarce knows any one now; how's your good missis?"

"Fresh as a daisy — what can I do for you in the town, eh?"

"Nothing, thank you, I was there myself a Saturday. I'm a going up now to see Betsey,

she be took bad with a chill, and poor creature her hands is full with so many children,—it be a poor look out for her bean't it?"

"Yes, that it is, I wish her better,—good day."

"Good day, Master Davis—lor, how that little thing do go," she said to herself with a low laugh, as at Will's command Jenny flew forward,—and soon the five miles and a half were compassed, and Jenny stood with her master before the Rising Sun.

Some few minutes after Will's departure, a sound from a crib by the fireside, disturbed Lucy from her work; she lifted her little nursling from its bed, and sitting in the low chair, held the 'wee' thing in her arms and sung to it in a low loving voice, softly rocking it backwards and forwards till again it sunk into its sweet dreamless sleep,—but she did not put it back in the cradle, she was so happy, holding it, gazing at its tiny features, so pleased and proud at their close resemblance to Will.

A tap at the door compelled her at length to rise, and throwing a shawl over the child, she opened it, and admitted a woman, who formed a strange contrast to herself, for she was as thin as Lucy was fat, as gloomy-looking as she was bright and cheerful.

"Oh! Mrs. Davis, I've come to ask if you'll

lend me one of your washing-tubs, I've got such a wash this week."

"Oh! willingly Mrs. Grimley, I'm glad to hear it."

"Glad! — it's a'most killing me, but there, that would be a good thing if it did it outright, perhaps."

"Why don't talk so, I'm sure you've no cause to be so down-hearted Mrs. Grimley."

"Ah! we all knows our own troubles best—Davis out?"

"Yes, he's gone to Leighton."

"He goes there pretty often, don't he?"

"About once a fortnight, I think."

"And stops all day?"

"Why yes, it's a long way, and he has such a deal to do."

"Umph! — dull enough for you."

"Oh! bless you, I'm not dull, the moment he's gone I'm thinking of his coming back, and that passes the time away."

"Well, I wonder you don't go with him sometimes; don't he never ask you?"

"No, he doesn't want me," said the merry laughing little woman.

"Ah! that's just it, I believe — well it ain't no business of mine, but it strikes me I should like to know what my husband had got after, going and stopping away whole days; but

there, I've lived a bit longer than you, and seen more — may I take the tub."

"Oh! yes, certainly."

The woman took it from the back kitchen where it was kept, and departed; but the shadow of her presence remained on Lucy's heart.

She seated herself in that low chair and began to think — what did take Will to town so often? He certainly never did tell her, nor offer to take her with him, though there was a cart in the shed — why was he so long gone, it was not so very far — he always went to the same inn, he had told her that — was it any one there? And then the flush of shame mounted to her forehead, to think she could suspect her kind, loving, honest husband, and giving her head a little shake, as though to shake out of it such unworthy thoughts, she said,—

"Now this is the fruit of idleness, if I had been busy I couldn't have sat here thinking such nonsense. Mother says 'tis the root of all evil, and so it is: I'll go to work directly," and laying her child softly in its cradle, Lucy took up her work and with a bright smile on her comely face, began merrily to sing an old country ditty, stitching almost in time to its lively measure — the shadow had de-

parted — but she was not long to be left undisturbed; another knock at the door called her to open it, and this time to no less a person than Sir Arthur Atherstone.

“I am sorry to disturb you Mrs. Davis, is your husband within?”

“No, Sir, he is not, he’s gone to Leighton.”

“Is he, what for?”

“I don’t know, Sir,” she answered; and again the banished thought seemed inclined to return.— “I thought it was for you, Sir.”

“No, I have had no occasion to send him.— When do you expect him back?”

“Not until the evening, Sir.”

“Indeed! — well, never mind, I will not further interrupt you Mrs. Davis; perhaps you will kindly send him to me when he does return:” and touching the brim of his hat in response to Lucy’s curtsy, he walked away, whistling to his large bloodhound who had accompanied him, and who had been racing round the small garden with a vague reminiscence of a bone he had once found there, very much to the discomfiture of a small white kitten, who, with her back in a perfect arch, and the fur sticking up like *chevaux de frise*, was spitting her spite at the intruder, on whom her indignation was entirely thrown away.

Lucy went back to her seat, and to her work, but the song was silenced, she worked on, but she neither sung nor smiled. Every one seemed to think it odd that Will was gone—and for so long too—it had never seemed so long before, he had so often been, and the hours had flown quickly, but now, how tedious they seemed. The baby awoke and cried, she took it up quite pettishly, not singing to it and rocking it as usual; it cried on, and its wailing cry touched the mother's heart at last, and a smile stole over her clouded face, and she held it to her more fondly, and nursed it tenderly till its cry was silenced, and again it slumbered peacefully.

Again her better self triumphed, and she determined not to be so childish as to distress herself with suspicions which had no foundation, or she should be ashamed, when he did come, to meet her husband and return his kind and loving welcome; but with all her efforts the hours did seem long, and she was glad when the light began to fade, and she felt that the first clouded day of her wedded life was passing away. She busied herself now in getting his supper, laying the cloth, putting his slippers to the fire, and drawing round his own arm-chair; all little, simple, but touching evidences that the absent one had been loved and remembered.

At length, the sharp ring of a horse's hoof, and a loud clear voice, summoned Lucy to the door, and there was Will himself. With a glad smile she ran down towards the gate, and then perceived, that he had a large bundle before him on the saddle, which he held with great care as he alighted, and asking his wife to draw the pony's rein through the gate while he went into the house, he walked in, carrying the bundle, Lucy following him.

"Well, my dear," he said, "I have brought you a present."

"La! Will dear, have you, how kind of you!"

"Yes, I don't know whether you'll like it though."

"I shall be sure to like it."

"Give me a chair then," and seating himself, he laid the bundle on the table, and removing the covering, revealed to his wife's astonished gaze, a beautiful sleeping child, some twelve or fourteen months old.

"Why, my gracious, Will — what do you mean," she exclaimed, — "a present for me."

"Yes, little woman, isn't it pretty too?"

"It's lovely, but I don't understand Will, what does it mean?" — a vision of Mrs. Grimley rose to her mind, and tears filled her eyes, as she raised them inquiringly to her husband's face.

"Lucy," he said very seriously, taking her hand, "you're a good, true-hearted, loving little wife to me; to show that love more than you have ever done, you must take care of this poor infant, with your own child, and care for its health and comfort as well, and what will perhaps be more difficult, ask no questions. Since we have been man and wife I have never had a secret from you; this is not mine, I must keep it faithfully."

The tears, which had trembled in her eyes, fell fast as her husband spoke, and drawing her hand angrily away, she said, "it was very hard upon her, very unfair, and she wouldn't touch the brat unless she knew all about it, that she wouldn't."

"Lucy," again he said, and still very gently, very seriously, "don't you recollect when Martin Grey went to sea, he left in our charge a sum of money for his old mother if he died; he was gone twelve months, and when he came back we gave it him, every farthing, in the same bag he'd put it in, didn't we?"

"Of course we did."

"Would you have thought it wicked to take that money?"

"Of course, Will, what nonsense are you talking."

“It was a sacred charge; we had promised to guard it carefully, Lucy, and we did. I have now given into my charge a secret, which I have promised to keep; and as faithfully as I kept that gold, I will. It is not the value of the charge, but the promise to take care of it, that should make it sacred in our eyes; if my heart were laid open before your face now, there’s not a thought in it I should blush for you to see: there’s nothing in it Lucy, but love for you and our little one; I never deceived any one in my life, it isn’t likely I should begin with you, — will you trust me?”

“I will, indeed I will; I do believe you, honestly I do. I have been a silly little naughty woman all day,” she said, “but I’m quite good now, as the children say; kiss me Willie, and you shall see if I’m not.”

He did kiss her, with all the warmth of his honest heart, and that night the little stranger shared her bed, and her own child slept in its crib by her side.

In a small, but prettily furnished room in the market-town of Leighton, at the precise hour in which Will reached home with the baby, a young and very pretty woman is seated over the bright little fire; her pale cheek resting on her hand, gazing into the glowing coals as though she was reading in them her destiny. Her soft

blue eyes are heavy and swollen from excessive weeping, her fair hair hangs in disorder about her face, and her whole appearance gives evidence of that abandonment to grief, which has made her forgetful of all but that grief.

In complete contrast to her is her companion, a woman some fifty or sixty years of age, who at the other side of the fire is busily employed at her needle. On her calm and placid features you can read nothing but content, no emotion seems ever to have disturbed her in her monotonous and regular life, she looks the very embodiment of peace; her scrupulously neat, simple dress, her dark brown hair without a single silver one amongst it, shining beneath a close lace cap, her industry and calm happy looks, are, as I have said, singularly contrasted by the beautiful, but hopelessly wretched-looking girl who is with her.

There has been for a long time silence in the room, no sound but the ticking of the fire and the click of the busy needle. At length, the patient worker spoke.

"Would it not be better to employ yourself, Effie?"

"I cannot, I can do nothing but think whether I have done right or not."

"But it seems to me that that is rather useless, Effie, now it is done."

"But do you think it is right?"

"I cannot be a judge, we are so very different that we could never act alike, and so we cannot think alike; but your conscience telling you, you have done it with the best motive, should be your support and consolation."

Any one but Magdalen Gray would have been tired of repeating this, for she had been asked fifty times the same question, and had as often given the same reply; she could not vary it, for she had no other idea upon the subject.

"Oh! how often do I wish I were like you Cousin Magdalen, so calm, so passionless; if you only knew half what I suffered, it would make your heart ache; but you can never know, and so you can never compassionate me."

"I am very sorry you are unhappy my dear Effie," answered Magdalen, measuring one piece of work against another with great exactness.

"I know you are, you feel for me, but not with me; you are sorry that I cannot smile, that I cannot take amusement in passing things, cannot work or read, in short, be happy as you are; but you do not feel with me the agony of a hopeless love, the misery

of being separated from the little creature that so lately lay upon my heart, and made life endurable: the torture of my false position, all, all which is killing me. You cannot understand it, and there are times when I yearn for some sympathising nature which could understand and would feel for me."

There was then, a slight, almost imperceptible change in the placid face of the woman she addressed, but she answered with the same gentleness.

"I wish I were more comfort to you, Effie, I am sure, but I fear I cannot be, and you must strive to content yourself with the use I am to you, the protection which my age affords you, and the home my little cottage provides you."

"All true, quite true, I know I seem to you ungrateful, but I am not really, dear Magdalen, but I am so very wretched. Oh! why was I not left a little light hearted, ignorant child in the station where God had placed me, I should now have been the happy, honoured wife of some honest labourer, and not the wretched, hopeless, aimless thing I am: the sight of Will Davis made my heart bound, and carried me back to those sweet childish days, when he met me at our little wicket gate, and carrying my books went with me to old Dame Bartlett's school — why was I ever taught more than she

could teach me—what has my knowledge brought me, but an endless weight of woe.”

“If you employed the learning you have had in some way, it would help you to bear your sorrow better; idly brooding on what there is no preventing, is sure to increase rather than lessen your grief, Effie.”

“Employment is always your song,” answered the poor girl pettishly, “and I have none, and could not do it if I had; my thoughts will only dwell on one subject, so it is useless talking.”

She rose, as if to avoid further chance of conversation, and went into a small inner room which served her as a sleeping apartment. It was almost dark there, save the sickly gas-light from the street, which just served to make the objects in the room visible. Close by the bedside was a child's cot, a little worsted sock was all that now lay upon the coverlet: poor Effie snatched it up, and kissing it as passionately as she would have done the little form, that had lain there a few short hours before, wept again as though her very heart would burst.

That you may better understand her sorrow, and be able to sympathize with it, I must carry you back to those childish days she has spoken of, and trace that poor weeping girl's history to the present time.

She was the only daughter of a poor labouring man in a small village in Devonshire, in which same village Will Davis was born; the cottages stood near each other, and with the rest of the village children they attended the Dame's school. With all the lovely little Effie was a favourite, but none loved her better than honest Will, and they were constant companions, though he was many years her senior. When she was about twelve her father died, and she and her mother were kindly taken into the Squire's house, for her mother had been his wife's nurse; they could not bear that she should want, and so gave her the name and salary of housekeeper, that she might not feel to be living on charity, and insisted on her little girl coming too.

Will was sadly distressed at this change, for he thought how rarely he should see his darling little playmate now, and that in her new grand home she would forget him; but still more was he disturbed when he learned that the great lady had taken such a fancy to the child, that she being childless, was going to adopt her, and that she was to be sent to a first rate London school to be educated. But Effie had not yet forgotten Will, and she stole out in the twilight of a Summer's evening to the shrubbery-gate, to bid an affectionate farewell to the companion of so many happy hours, between

whom and herself a mighty barrier was now to be raised.

A few years were quickly gone, and, at the age of seventeen, Effie Gray was an orphan, but receiving respect and attention from a household of servants as the adopted daughter of their mistress, and admiration and praise for her beauty and talents, from the visitors who frequented the house. What a change for the poor cottager's daughter! She was not proud with all this, her warm, enthusiastic, loving nature was unchanged, and on her return to the village, she sought out her old companions, but those she cared the most for were gone, and amongst them Will Davis.

The house was full of guests, it was lovely Summer weather, and her benefactress wished to see the effect her beautiful *protégée* would cause. She was well satisfied, for the lovely and graceful Effie was the theme of conversation. Among the visitors was one whose handsome person, and delightful manners, claimed from Effie more attention than she accorded to any other. When he spoke she listened eagerly, drinking in each sound of his low sweet voice; every fancy that he expressed made an indelible impression on her mind, and she found herself acting in accordance with his every whim.

For him, the rich masses of her golden hair,

were taken from their braids and suffered to fall in graceful curls to her waist; and she would not have exchanged a diadem for the smile of approval, he accorded to this yielding to his taste—for him, the flowery Italian music, it had caused her hours of labour to learn, was replaced by English ballads, which she sang with touching expression, while he stood beside her and listened. No one was surprised, therefore, that she accepted, though many wondered, that he offered her his hand and heart; and soon the marriage bells rang a merry peal for the wedding of the once poor little Effie Gray, with the rich and noble Sir Arthur Atherstone.

The wedding was over, and the elegant carriage with its high-bred horses had borne the happy couple away; and yet she, who had wrought all this change for Effie, felt a strong presentiment of evil, and was weeping in her own room. The young girl had wound herself about her heart until she loved her as tenderly as though she had been her own, so tenderly that she had not had the moral courage to dash the cup of happiness from her lips, even though she feared there might be poison in it, which one word of her's might have done.

She knew the extraordinary pride of Sir Arthur, knew that he would rather die than

marry beneath him, he had often said so; and yet she had permitted him blindly to love and marry the daughter of a common labourer, believing that the young and lovely creature, who had so fascinated him, was a relation of her own.

In her parting words she impressed on Effie the necessity for secrecy respecting her origin, leading her to believe that Sir Arthur knew it, but did not like it noticed.

Poor simple hearted Effie readily promised this, little dreaming of the precipice on which she stood; she knew he loved her, that he had told her so, that he had asked her to be his wife, could there be any sorrow after that!

Well for the kind but ill-judging protectress who now wept such bitter tears for her, that death closed her eyes ere she saw the misery she had entailed on that hapless girl.

An accident revealed the secret of her birth after a few months of happiness, which seemed like a dream, and the only link that thus remained of that happy past, was her wedding ring, and a letter which, with eyes nearly starting from their sockets, she read again and again almost without understanding.

“ I regret deeply that you should in conjunction with others, have practised on me the

gross deceit with which I have just become acquainted, as it entails while we live, wretchedness for one, perhaps both of us. Fool that I was to be lured from my own preconceived notions by your lovely face — tempted to believe that goodness was something more than a name, but the weak delusion has passed away; you have deceived me for position and a title I suppose, but you are very young, and to be pitied rather than blamed: others who knew how strongly I felt on this point are far more culpable. But, for both our sakes, we must part, Effie, now and for ever. I shall live on the hope that the eternal oblivion of the grave will soon come to blot out your memory, which till then with its fair vision of bliss must ever haunt me. By the world's laws you are my wife, I, therefore, settle on you an income which will place you far above the reach of want, but if you act at all in accordance with my wish you will drop my name, or at least the title, but this I do not command, I simply ask.

“Should you have any wish to express, address me at my Lawyer's, he will always know where I am, and I will fulfil it to the letter, so that it trench not on my determination, never to see you again.

Your most miserable

ARTHUR ATHERSTONE.”

Poor girl! poor child almost, who would not pity thee in thine agony of grief, but with clasped hands and streaming eyes, she kneels to One whose ears are open to the prayers of the orphan, whose pity is as measureless as His power; and she, the young deserted wife, is calmer, and better able to bear this heavy sorrow, than he who has deserted her, and who in the strength of his own pride has called on no divine assistance to support and comfort him.

Where to go, or what to do, she scarcely knew, and whether to answer this cruel letter or no, she could not quite decide. A thousand different ideas flashed through her mind, but at length she determined merely to send him a few words in reply, and at once seek out the only relative she had in the world, a cousin of her father's, and thenceforward with her, in close retirement, pass the remainder of her days; dropping, as her husband wished, his name and title, and calling herself Mrs. Gray.

Tears, actual tears stood in the proud man's eyes, as he read the simple words she sent him: —

“Arthur, may the God I love and trust, and who is supporting me in this fearful hour, forgive you as I do.

EFFIE GRAY.”

Yes, not the least portion of her trial was the knowledge which had been drawing on her by degrees, but which she had tried to shut her eyes to, the awful knowledge that her husband was an unbeliever, — that he had stood at the altar by her side, only in conformity with the world's laws, and that he had truly parted with her now for ever,—for he had no hope or belief in another and better world. This was indeed an agonising conviction, and she could not but consider, that she was thus punished for her inattention to the Apostolic injunction, “be not unequally yoked together with unbelievers.” This, the most important consideration, which should have influenced her choice of the being to whom she entrusted her happiness, had been overlooked and forgotten by the young and loving girl; and it was only when some passing allusion to the ceremony called forth from her husband a smile and sneer, that the fatal truth began to dawn on her, which his conduct and his letter now so fatally confirmed.

But the orphan's prayer for advice, assistance and direction was heard and answered, and the kind relative she addressed offered to dismiss the family, who were boarding with her, and take Effie as an inmate instead; this arrangement was soon made, and Effie found herself in a humble but pretty home, with the im-

passive quiet Magdalen Gray for a companion.

She had moved in a better station of life than Effie's parents, for her family had realized a small independence in trade, which had enabled them to give to this their only child a tolerable education, and leave her sufficiently well provided for; but her nature was most opposed to that of her young and beautiful cousin, who all sensitiveness and excitement, could scarcely bear with the immovable, and as it appeared to her, cold disposition of Magdalen; but at length an opportunity presented itself of proving that there was a true warm woman's heart beneath that cold exterior.

Effie, after many days of suffering and danger, became a mother, and with untiring devotion Magdalen nursed her, never leaving her night or day, encouraging and supporting her with assurances of that love and mercy which sustains us in all sorrows, in warm and earnest accents, and with a simple eloquence which Effie had not believed her capable of; and although when the danger was past and Effie was again about, Magdalen returned to her former calm cold manner, Effie knew it was only manner, and the memory of her sick room came vividly before her, when her cousin's frigidity at times irritated her.

As soon as she was able she sent a few lines to her husband, whom she heard was living, curiously enough, at a country seat a few miles only from Leighton, the name of the town in which her cousin resided, to announce to him the birth of their child, with a faint hope that it might soften him; but the time passed on and he took no notice of her, and she gave up hoping and tried to be content, if not happy, with her beautiful child.

Through the same source by which she traced her husband, she learned that his gardener was her old friend and playmate, Will Davis; and hearing that he came frequently to Leighton, she determined to renew her acquaintance with him, as through him she might at least hear constant news of her husband, who, notwithstanding his cruel desertion she so fondly loved, and for whose welfare, temporal and eternal, she never ceased to pray.

Sending word to the inn, therefore, that the next time Davis came a lady wished to speak to him, she awaited his arrival with impatience. His astonishment can well be imagined; and constantly to carry news to his once darling little Effie of the husband she so loved, was the occasion of Will's oft recurring visits to Leighton, which at her request, he kept a profound secret, even from his wife, as Effie feared

if the knowledge of her proximity became known to Sir Arthur, it might drive him away.

In the interval which elapsed between the last and the previous visit, Effie was seated one evening with her infant slumbering beside her, gazing up at the stars — the ‘forget-me-not of the angels,’ — which in the clear frosty air, were shining with peculiar brilliancy; thinking of and praying for her husband, praying that the light of truth might yet dawn on his soul, and that at least, they might be united in that bright land beyond the stars, where the tears would be wiped from all eyes. — At length weary with her long and fixed gaze, she lay back in her arm-chair and her eyelids closed in sleep.

Suddenly a flash of light seemed to wake her, and there stood before her an undefined form, from which she received no impression, but that a large Star was gleaming in the room, sending forth rays of light into every dark corner. She felt no fear, only unmixed astonishment, and no power of speech. From the form a sound came forth, ‘still and small,’ like a whisper, but distinctly audible — a sound as though light had been endowed with voice: — the words were, “Faith without works is dead,” — “Out of the mouths of babes and sucklings

He has ordained strength." In a second it was gone, and she was alone in her room, and the stars were gleaming in the clear sky, and her baby was still sleeping peacefully, and Magdalen's busy needle was still clicking in the adjoining room.

Yes, all was the same, but the young mother who sat there; a fixed determination had sprung up in her breast—she would tell no one; who had she to tell but Magdalen, who would think her mad—but she would work for that husband as well as pray for him—a wild, perhaps romantic notion had taken possession of her mind, from the words of the vision or dream—they still rung in her ears, again she repeated, "Out of the mouths of babes and sucklings;" and on the morrow when Will Davis arrived, to the wonder of simple hearted Magdalen, Effie entrusted her child, the only comfort of her lonely life, to his care, bidding him, as it grew older, continually contrive that it should be in the presence of its father, only enjoining secrecy from Mrs. Davis. She offered him a handsome remuneration for this care of her darling, which she insisted on his accepting, to be paid quarterly; and with a calmness which surprised herself, she saw him bear the child away.

But the almost supernatural support she seemed to have received went with the child,

and as you have seen, her grief could no longer be restrained. The old impetuosity, excited by Magdalen's calmness, again returned, for she felt more than ever, the need of a mind greater and stronger than her own, which could advise and counsel her.

How often do we feel the necessity for some one to applaud what we have done, ere we can entirely be convinced ourselves that it is right : such was Effie's feeling now, she wanted something more than that oft repeated answer of Magdalen's, she wanted some one who did not only tell her coldly to employ herself, but who sought employment and amusement for her. It is seldom that the wretched are energetic, great sorrow brings with it a disinclination for any active employment, and how valuable are those friends who with delicate tact, find objects which divert and attract the saddened heart from the contemplation of its own misery. Magdalen Gray only knew it was sinful to be idle, fruitless to complain, and having never known any grief herself, could not, as Effie justly said, understand hers, or how to deal with it.

After Effie had been for some time weeping in her own room, Magdalen called her to supper ; she refused to take any, so Magdalen ate her own quietly, locked up the things, wished Effie good night, hoped she would be

better in the morning, betook herself to bed, and was soon sleeping as calmly as a child. Had Effie been ill, and she could have nursed her, she would have done so, as she had proved, untiringly; but she felt she could not help her now, could not remove the cause of her tears or make them cease to flow, yet she named her name amongst those who were afflicted in mind, body or estate, in her simple prayer, and so, perhaps she had done more for her, than many who might have stayed beside her, and entered more readily into her grief.

When Effie's weary eyelids closed at length in sleep, there glittered again before them the same luminous Star.

And the stern unrelenting husband,—what of him?—was his life more happy than his weeping wife's? There were times when Effie almost laughed,—he seldom smiled—times when she felt calm and full of hope,—he was always restless, and had no hope. Childless mother, widowed wife, your lot is enviable compared to his.

A few days had passed away since Lucy had been entrusted with the care of the little stranger child, and anxious to make reparation for the petulance she first showed, and the apparent distrust she had evinced of her husband, she was unremitting in her care and attention

to the little creature ; and was well rewarded by Will's delight and praise, by the pleasure expressed in his happy honest face, as he stood by the side of the cradle, where in the day-time Lucy laid both the children ; and seated beside it, one foot on the rocker, she sung and rocked the little things to sleep. There was a strong contrast between them, the little brown, healthy, plain face of her own child, and the exquisitely fair and beautiful features of the little stranger — yet, wise and merciful ordination — it was on the little brown plain face, that Lucy's earnest gaze of love was fixed, and she would not have had one of its funny little features altered for worlds, for it was 'the picture of Will' and how could any one think *that* ugly ?

She was seated as I have described her, rocking the two children, working and singing merrily, alone, for Will had just gone up to the house to speak to Sir Arthur about planting some trees, when her neighbour Mrs. Grimley entered.

"I didn't knock, Mrs. Davis, for I found the door warn't fastened."

"All right, Mrs. Grimley, how do you do?"

"Oh ! pretty middling, I just looked in 'cause I'm going to Leighton, and I thought you might want something as I could do for you."

"Thank you, no, I don't want any thing," and she looked up with such a bright, merry glance at her neighbour, as though she really had every thing her heart could desire, and really did not want any thing.

"Why, lor bless me," said Mrs. Grimley, approaching the cradle, "who's child have you got there?"

"That's a nurse-child I've got," she answered gaily.

"What hadn't you got enough to do, without taking a nurse-child, but who's is it then?"

Lucy's face flushed at this repeated inquiry, which she was unable to answer, but feeling that it would never do to say she did not know; she replied,— "A friend of Will's."

"A friend of Will's! Lor! how odd, ain't it well then, that it's out to nurse?"

"Oh dear, yes, it's quite well?"

"It's mother isn't then I suppose?"

"I never ask questions that don't concern me, Mrs. Grimley," answered Lucy sharply, "I've got the care of the child, and that's all I know."

"Ah! your husband's a lucky man."

"That's just my opinion," said Lucy, recovering her good humour.

"I heard," continued her visitor, "that he'd

brought a child home from Leighton for you to look after, but I couldn't believe it, and shouldn't if I hadn't seen it with my own two eyes, I'm sure."

"What, did you think there were no such things as children in Leighton?"

"Ah! well," said Mrs. Grimley, without answering the question, "it's a good thing we ain't all alike; however, if you've got nothing for me to do for you, I'll go;" and shrugging her shoulders and shaking her head, as she glanced once more at the unconscious object of her remarks, she wished Lucy good-bye and departed.

Lucy did not resume her song when she was gone, though she still worked busily: soon the merry whistle announced her husband's approach, and he came gaily into the room.

"Lucy, my girl, I'm going to Leighton for Sir Arthur."

The smile with which she welcomed him vanished, as she said,

"Oh! Will, you're always going to Leighton."

"So long as there's no other town near, I must; so come look alive, old lady, hat, gloves, and whip."

"You must wait a moment," she said, "I must fasten off my thread."

"Well, I don't mind waiting a moment—

law, bless those dear children, how pretty they do look — don't you love them Luce."

" I love mine !"

" Oh ! and the other too, I know you do. Where's the good little woman like you in the world, that wouldn't love a poor little helpless innocent like that : it's natural, it's born with them — what's the child's name, by the by, I suppose it's been christened,—how stupid of me not to ask—well, I must to-day—tie a knot in my handkerchief."

" To-day, are you going to see any one who belongs to it to-day, Will ?" said Lucy, looking earnestly at him.

" Why, yes, Lucy, I couldn't have the heart to go into Leighton, and not say how the child was getting on."

" To the mother ?"

" Yes, Lucy, to the mother."

She made no answer, only rose and got his gloves and hat and whip, as he had asked her, and gave them to him silently.

" Is that all, Lucy."

" I believe so."

" Then I ain't to have a kiss."

She held up her face to his without replying, and he saw there were tears in her bright eyes. He kissed her tenderly, so tenderly, and said—

" Dear old girl, I'll make all the haste home

I can, and next time I go to Leighton, I'll have out the cart and you shall go too."

She smiled then, and kissed him warmly, she was such a sweet temper, her sunny disposition rarely permitted the clouds to do more than pass, and she did love her husband so very dearly she could not be vexed with him long; and so she watched him out of sight as usual, smiling and waving her hand to him as long as he could see her: and he was soon home, much sooner than she expected or hoped for, bringing her a new dress, and a toy for their baby, which pleased her even more. That evening they sat over their bright little fire, and comfortable supper, chatting and laughing so happily, scarcely heeding the wind which blew hoarsely round their dwelling, and the rain which pattered against the window.

Only one topic seemed to be avoided by mutual consent,—the journey to Leighton,—and yet Lucy was dying to ask him all about it, and what the child's name was to be; but she could not make up her mind, as he did not speak of it, to broach the subject, it might cloud their happy evening, so she said nothing; but just as they were going to bed, Will said, as though it had suddenly struck him —

"The child's name is Stella, Lucy."

"Ugly name enough," answered Lucy, rather shortly.

"Yes, it don't strike me as very pretty, but I understand it means in some foreign language, a star; and the poor mother, Lucy, was very wretched when it was born, and she thought it came a little bright thing to comfort her, so she called it a star, and that was a pretty thought now wasn't it?"

Will had got a vein of poetry in his composition, with all his roughness; nurtured perhaps by living amongst and tending flowers for so many years.

"Then how can she bear to part with it, Will?" asked Lucy.

"She has a good reason, Lucy,—but come, it's bed-time isn't it? Let's shut up shop."

Lucy made no answer, only sighed. Oh! that secret—daily it grew more irksome to Will to keep, as he saw how his want of confidence pained his little wife; he felt it was hard upon her, and yet he had promised,—what could he do? but he laid down that night determined to go and ask Effie to absolve him from a promise, which seemed likely to poison his domestic peace, and render miserable a life, which had been hitherto so happy: unfortunately, the wind, which continued to blow very roughly, kept Lucy awake, and in those waking hours, she lay and thought again and

again, how very singular it was that Will should be so mysterious about this child.

All Mrs. Grimley's inuendoes came back to her mind, until at length her one tormenting thought kept her awake even when the rough wind had lulled; and when morning dawned and Will rose for his early work, she never spoke to him, but let him go out unnoticed, though he stooped and kissed her very gently, thinking she was sleeping. But when he returned to his breakfast, and she, who was wont to be all smiles and cheerfulness, was sulky and serious, resisting every effort he made to restore her to good temper, Will lost his, and the determination with which he had gone to sleep, he revoked, angrily saying to himself, "She won't trust, won't believe me; I shan't trust her."

No longer whistling, and joking with the men, but silently, sullenly, Will pursued his avocations; even his reserved master noticed his altered manner, and asked him if he were ill.

Will gave him a short answer, for he felt cross with every one, and not less so with Sir Arthur, through whom his present discomfort arose; but this unsatisfactory reply was not enough for his master, for Will's cheerfulness, industry and honesty, had won for him a certain

interest in the heart of this stern and lonely man : he liked to hear him as he sat in his spacious rooms alone, whistling so merrily at his work, and talking and joking with the men, and though he never praised him more than to say he had "as yet found him an honest and industrious person," still it was quite evident that he was a favourite.

Again, therefore, he said :— "I fear you must be ill Davis, for you are not like yourself this morning."

"I'm just out, Sir, that's what it is," answered Will, putting his foot on the spade and digging it firmly into the hard ground ; and then as though a sudden thought had struck him, he continued with marked emphasis, looking full at Sir Arthur as he spoke :

"Me and my wife, my dear little woman ! have fell out, for the first time since our wedding-day, and everything seems to go wrong, Sir, in consequence ; the very shrubs I transplanted yesterday have withered, and I don't seem to know what I'm about : there's something in a wife's happy smiling face that's like sunshine to a man's heart, when once he's used to it—and mine I think without it would wither like those shrubs."

Sir Arthur had turned half aside as he uttered the first few words, and at the conclusion of his

speech, his back was entirely towards him, and he appeared to be busily employed in examining a plant near him—he made no reply. Will resumed his digging, and in another moment Sir Arthur walked away, but to himself he repeated then, and many times that day—“and mine without it would wither like those shrubs.”

After his solitary dinner, Sir Arthur sat in his dining-room, which though luxuriously and splendidly furnished still looked dreary, it was so silent, so lonely, even memory did not fill it with tenants: he had bought the place immediately after his separation from his wife, and lived in it ever since alone, inviting no guest either to visit or stay with him.

The heavy velvet curtains were now closely drawn, the logs of wood blazed on the hearth, the claret jug stood on the table beside him, and a plate of biscuits—the rest of the dessert he had ordered away—but these biscuits he kept breaking and eating, and throwing pieces to the bloodhound, who seated at his feet with his large ears erect, and his eyes fixed on his master, made snaps at the morsels he tossed him, which disappeared down his capacious throat at one gulp.

As I have said, many times that day had Sir Arthur repeated to himself Will's words; he had felt that the absence of the smile he had so

loved, had withered his heart, that in its sunshine there might have sprung up better, happier thoughts. More than with her beauty, had he been struck with the purity and simplicity of Effie's nature, he was beginning since his knowledge of her to believe that 'goodness was no name, and happiness no dream,' and then to be deceived, to find that his golden idol was but dross, that with that guileless manner, that seemingly devoted love for him, she had deceived him so grossly; it had indeed withered his heart, and all the tender buds of better feeling which seemed inclined to blossom.

He had sat some time tossing biscuits to Don, and thinking of Effie, when the unusual sound of a loud peal at the door-bell disturbed him; he started to his feet and listened: he was always in dread that Effie would discover his retreat and seek him, and he felt, although he would not have owned it, that to see her sweet face, perhaps in tears, and hear her voice, would shake his stern resolve. How little he thought that but a few short miles divided them, that she knew where he was, but would never molest him again.

The door opened, and his confidential servant, who always waited on him, said, that Mr. Mowbray the Parish doctor wished to speak with him.

"What does he want, have you any idea, Miller?"

"No, Sir Arthur, I don't know at all; to ask your name for the head of some subscription list probably."

"Well, say I will see him."

When Miller again opened the door, it was to admit Mr. Mowbray. He was a little man, with a shiny, bald, strangely shaped head, exhibiting an inordinately large 'bump' of benevolence, his face was pale without being sickly, but he looked prematurely old; his hands were white and delicate as a woman's, and he had a continued habit of rubbing them one in the other whenever he was speaking: he wore a large pair of silver mounted spectacles, and was dressed with scrupulous neatness and cleanliness, though his black suit bore evidence of good service.

"I am come, Sir Arthur," he said, when he had seated himself in the chair to which Sir Arthur pointed, "I am come on behalf of some poor creatures to supplicate your kind assistance, well knowing that you are never deaf to such appeals, and that out of the good store with which God has blessed you, you are always ready to minister to the wants of others."

Sir Arthur moved rather restlessly on his

chair, but answered with his usual politeness. "I am always willing, Mr. Mowbray, to assist those on whom fortune has not smiled; I have more than enough for my own requirements, it would be strange indeed if I did not from my superabundance, willingly give to those who are less favoured."

The Doctor sighed deeply as he replied, "If all the rich so argued, there would be fewer poor, Sir Arthur, but I will advert at once to the object of my intrusion on you at this unseasonable hour; there is a family in this village whom I have visited often in my capacity of a doctor" — he did not say how often as a Christian man — "and they are at present in great trouble. I went there just now and found the young wife, barely nineteen Sir Arthur, with two little children, weeping bitterly, and had I not known her well, I could scarcely have credited her story,— the reason for her passionate tears,— she was deserted by her husband."

Too much interested in his errand and the hope to excite the compassion of his auditor, to perceive, even with his practised eye, the deadly pallor which had overspread Sir Arthur's face, he continued — "Positively deserted by her husband, and so left with her two children wholly without the means of support; he has been gone three days, and to-day she has

divided the last piece of bread in the house with her children, and has not tasted food herself. I am not over-burdened with money myself," he said, with a little nervous laugh, "and though I have supplied her with food for to-night and perhaps to-morrow, something more than that must be done; and it struck me, that you, Sir Arthur, would generously assist her, it is such a peculiarly sad case."

He paused, as if for a reply, and Sir Arthur said, in a low strange voice—"What was the man's object for leaving her, it must have been a very strong one."

"That is the very thing which is so distressing to the poor girl, Sir Arthur, she can't imagine the cause why he has left her or where he is gone; she fancies he is weary of working so hard for such small gain, and that he has gone to seek his fortune, that he cannot bear to see her want for many things: like a true woman she makes a thousand excuses for him, gives him credit for the best motive though she and her children are starving. Oh! they are fine creatures, noble-hearted beings, women, Sir Arthur, from the highest to the lowest; it is a touching sight the patient sorrow of that poor deserted wife, and the true love which, through all, endeavours to shield her husband from blame."

How little did that simple-hearted man dream of the agony he was inflicting on his listener, who, made no reply now, but rose and rang the bell, and remained standing on the hearth-rug with his back to the fire playing with his watch-chain. The dog, who had been scrutinizing the visitor ever since his entrance, rose also, and walking up to him began vehemently licking his delicate white hands. Good discriminating Don, thus you endeavoured to testify your admiration for that self-denying, excellent being, whose life was passed in going about 'doing good.' The door opened and Miller appeared in answer to the summons of the bell.

"My desk and keys," said his master, looking up.

"Yes, Sir, I've brought them, Sir, expected you'd want them, Sir," and the servant placed them on the table, and with a quick but silent step left the room, closing the door softly behind him. Sir Arthur unlocked his desk, still silently, took out a cheque-book, wrote a draft, and gave it across the table to the little doctor.

"That will I trust prevent any fear of starvation, Mr. Mowbray."

"Oh! Sir Arthur, I am indeed very grateful, really more than I have words to express," said Mowbray, his eyes glistening behind his spectacles.

"I really do not see that you, have any cause for gratitude, Mr. Mowbray."

"No cause for gratitude, Sir, not for being made more happy than I think I ever was before; I am not ashamed to say, Sir Arthur, that I am a poor man, a very poor man, and it is the first time I have ever held in my hand such a sum of money to give away, to take to poor suffering people; think Sir, what this piece of paper will do."

"It will make the woman cease to weep for her husband," said Sir Arthur coldly.

This was a speech beyond Mowbray's comprehension; he only looked up therefore wondering at Sir Arthur, and then rose to depart; saying, "his errand accomplished, he would not longer intrude."

"Pray do not hurry yourself, Mr. Mowbray. I do not consider you by any means an intruder; allow me to offer you a glass of wine, do you drink claret."

"Thank you, you are very good," said Mowbray, rather hesitatingly, for well knowing the retired, unsociable disposition of Sir Arthur, he scarcely knew whether he ought to accept his invitation to remain any longer.

"It is a cold night," said Sir Arthur, perceiving his hesitation, "perhaps some mulled port would suit you better." And without waiting for a reply he rang the bell again.

“ Miller,” he said, when the man entered, “ take away that,” pointing to his desk, “ and bring some mulled port wine quickly.”

“ Yes, Sir Arthur,” he answered, but he looked very much astonished, such a thing was almost unheard of ; that his master should invite any one to remain after their business was transacted was incredible. Don was as much inclined as his master for the doctor to stay it appeared, as he had seated himself beside him, and rested his cold black nose in his hand.

“ Do you find much distress in the village, Mr. Mowbray ?”

“ No, Sir, on the whole I think we have not much to complain of. The farmers pay their men very well, and only in a few cases, where a love of drink is a besetting sin, do I find any very serious poverty.”

“ Whereabouts does this woman live, you have been telling me of ?”

“ At that small cottage at the end of the lane as you turn off to Leighton, her name, poor soul, is Simmonds. To-morrow, Sir, you may rest assured, your name will be mentioned in her prayers ; I shall not go there to night, for I have administered some quieting medicine which will I trust enable her to sleep, and I must not disturb her. Oh ! what a blessing to be rich,—to be able to give to those that need.”

Several times when he had thus spoken, Sir Arthur's searching glance had been upon him,—on his thin harassed face, and his worn clothes; his appearance bespoke so plainly respectable poverty, and yet he had continued to rejoice in his ability to serve others, never seeming to consider his own necessities. Was this really genuine—poor Sir Arthur, it was his misfortune to doubt every one; and yet this unostentatious man interested him in spite of himself, he liked to hear him talk, and even when the wine was finished, and again he rose to go, Sir Arthur begged him to stay, and the conversation grew graver, deeper,—and forgetting his somewhat nervous dread of this stern, solitary man, as he warmed in his arguments, Mowbray talked so well, exhibited such a perfect knowledge of the subjects on which he spoke, that with real interest and attention Sir Arthur listened.

“And you really believe,” he said, at length, “that the motives which induced these self-sacrifices you tell me you have been witness to, were pure and true, that there was no self-interest to serve under this mask of self-denial.”

“Truly I believe it, Sir Arthur, and I hope I shall not live to think otherwise.”

“Very early was my belief shaken, Mr. Mowbray, for I found that those whose external conduct purchased for them the good opinion

of the world, were as bad really as those whose acts defied it: worse to my thinking, for there is nothing so bad as hypocrisy, and I have lived to feel there is but one true happiness,—to die and forget.”

“ There is much to be done here, Sir Arthur, first ; which if well done, will make it a happiness to die, because we shall merit the promised reward. Life would indeed be a hopeless, weary struggle, if to die were all ; when I lie down at night, worn out as I mostly am with the fatigues of the day, how should I rise early again to pursue the same wearisome course, if I were not assured, that ‘ there remaineth a rest.’ You have no idea how the thought of the eternal City, of the joys promised us in another world, support and bear me through this. Do not think me a vain boaster, for telling you this, I do it for His glory who supported me through it ; but, Sir Arthur, there have been many days, when I have worked hard from six o’clock in the morning till twelve at night, on dry bread and water, because I have given all the money I possessed to the starving poor of the miserable parish in which I once lived : and I was happier over that scanty meal, than an Alderman at a feast. I was taught this by example, Sir, by the example of the poor whom I have lived amongst.

“No one who has witnessed their endurance, their self-denial, their charity to one another, and their calm, happy death-beds, would doubt that a Divine power alone supported them ; or the truth of that Holy word which has made them believe in Him and implore his assistance. I would simply say to those who are harassed by doubts,—visit the poor ; make yourselves acquainted with their lives ; hear them, through agonies of mind and body, bless the God whom they believe only chastens those he loves ; watch them in their dying moments, parting from parents, wives, husbands, children, calmly pointing, if they cannot speak, to Heaven with a happy smile upon their lips, or murmuring, if their strength permits them, ‘there we shall meet again ;’ see, as I have seen such scenes, and, as by an enchanter’s wand, the mist of doubt will vanish, and the light of truth shine into their souls.”

“Why amongst the poor and ignorant alone is such piety and goodness found, Mr. Mowbray ?”

“Do not mistake me, Sir Arthur, far be it from me to say it is only amongst the poor ; but I speak to you now from my own experience, which has been more amongst them, and I do think that a sceptic would be more struck with the Truth when he sees, in the midst of the

direst temptations and privations, the respect for God's laws which preserves them from sin; the resignation which prevents complaints; and the love which dictates praise; than amongst those who possessed of every worldly advantage and comfort, would indeed be singularly ungrateful not to love and bless the Giver of such good gifts. But really," he said, suddenly glancing at a clock on the mantelpiece, "I have remained here a most unconscionable time, and I must indeed wish you good night. Allow me again to repeat my thanks for your ——"

"No, no, Mr. Mowbray, I merit no thanks indeed, for I have simply given what I do not want; when I dine on bread and water, to give the poor a meal," he said with a gracious smile, "then you shall thank me as much as you please;" and shaking one of the delicate hands warmly in his, he parted with his guest.

On the following day, Sir Arthur might have been seen to wander up the lane, with his usual thoughtful, serious air, moving his head gravely in return for the 'bobs' of the children and the bows of the men he met, and to stop before the white cottage at the end. It looked very melancholy and deserted, as though it were not inhabited, but he knocked for admission, and the summons was answered by a very fat woman who appeared any thing but like an unhappy deserted wife.

“ This is Mrs. Simmonds’s, I believe ; is it not ? ”

“ It be their cottage, Sir.”

“ Is she in ? ”

“ No, Sir, poor creature, she bean’t, didn’t you know, Sir, she be gone to find her husband. She arranged with me, as I’m a lone woman, to come here and take care of the children, saying she’d pay me what little she could, poor soul, but I’m sure I didn’t want to take it of her ; and at day-break this morning, she was off.”

“ But does she know where he is gone ? ”

“ Not she, Sir, but he’s got a rich brother in London, and she thinks may be he’s gone to him, and so she’s started to tramp the whole way ; ’twas heart-breaking to see her part with the children, but she says to me, ‘ Peggy, says she, the husband I’ve sworn to love and cherish, I must think of afore these ; God and you will take care of them for me till I come back, and I never will, till I hear something of him ’—and so she went. I watched her as long as I could see her, she never once looked back, I think she thought her heart would fail her if she did ; and as soon as she was clean gone, I came back in the house and cried like a great baby, that I just did : but law, Sir, excuse my manners, keeping you standing in the cold, won’t you step in ? ”

“ No, no, thank you,—has Mr. Mowbray, the Doctor, been here ?”

“ Yes, Sir, he came about nine o'clock this morning, and he was surprised to think poor Nelly was gone ; and sorry too, because he'd got a fine sum of money a gentleman had given him for her, and he thought it would have pleased her so, but he's a going now to put it in the Bank, and pay me so much a week for minding and keeping the children. Pretty creturs, I'm glad there's a something for them, to keep 'em out of the poor-house till she comes back, at any rate ; for willing as I am, I couldn't have kept them long : I am but a poor cretur myself, and I expect she'll be a long time before she finds him.”

“ I'm obliged to you for your information,” said Sir Arthur ; “ should you hear any news of either Mrs. Simmonds or her husband, I will thank you to send it up to the Hall.”

“ Yes, Sir, thank you, Sir, I'll be sure.”

More thoughtfully than he had come, did Sir Arthur return ; with bent head and measured step, he took his way home : — this poor young woman was walking to London in search of her husband — Effie made no effort to seek him — but then his conscience reminded him of how sternly he had said, he would never see her again, and how he had coldly allowed to

pass without notice the announcement of his child's birth: his child,—the word seemed to strike agreeably on his ear, surely it would be a happy thing to have a child growing up with him, learning to love him,—but then, what was the use of having ties on earth, when they must all be ruptured by the oblivion of the grave,—better live on unloving and unloved. Nelly Simmonds did not think so though, that young delicate woman was braving the perils, and alone, of a long journey on foot for love; then she believed in a re-union in a bright world beyond the grave. Thus thinking, he reached his own Lodge; the door stood open, but he did not hear as usual Lucy's merry voice singing, and it seemed so strange,—though we do not note the cheerful warbling of the birds, still if it ceased and our woods and groves were silent, how we should miss their sweet harmony. Lucy's singing and Will's merry whistle, were pleasant, cheerful sounds to which Sir Arthur had grown accustomed, and he did not like the cessation.

He wanted to speak to Will and so he tapped at the door, but receiving no answer, he walked in; there was no one there, but feeling sure that Lucy would not go out and leave the door open, he thought she was only upstairs and he would wait. He looked round the

room with a sort of pleasant interest, for it was so clean and pretty though so humble. Presently a low cooing sound attracted his attention, which he found proceeded from a cradle near the fire; for in it lay a lovely child wide awake, making the most innocent noises over a ring of India rubber, which, fastened round its neck with a blue ribband, it was pulling at and biting.

A sudden spasm appeared to seize and contract his heart as he gazed at it, a vision of his wife rose up before him,—of his beautiful, suffering, deserted wife—he pressed his hand tightly over his eyes for a moment, and then bending over the cradle, gazed earnestly at the child. His watch-chain gleaming in the light, attracted the little creature's attention and dropping the ring, she held out her hands and crowed and laughed more loudly; he put his finger near her then, on which shone a diamond ring, and her tiny ones clasped immediately round it. How strange the feel of that little grasp, those feeble fingers seemed to him to hold his so fast he could not move it; and so he stood, hearing nothing, seeing nothing but that child in its cradle, not knowing that Will who had entered, was watching him with tears in his honest eyes. A second or two passed, and then they were disturbed by Lucy's

entrance, her sleeves rolled up to her elbows and her hands covered with soap-suds.

Sir Arthur turned suddenly, and Lucy coloured with confusion at finding herself in the presence of the great man in such disorder. Sir Arthur seeing this, spoke to her, and with the tact possessed only by the true gentleman, placed her at once at her ease—

“ I have to apologise to you Mrs. Davis for intruding on your house in this manner, but the door stood invitingly open, and as I could make no one hear me, I ventured to walk in, imagining you were not far off.

“ No, Sir, I was only just out in the wash-house, I’m quite ashamed I didn’t hear you, and you’ve been waiting.”

“ It is of no consequence, I wanted Davis, and here he is; can you come with me, Davis.”

“ Yes, Sir, certainly.”

“ The wind has torn away that creeping plant from the Conservatory, and I see one of your men is nailing it up again; now I do not like it, and would much rather as the wind has torn it away, it were replaced by another: I want you to come and see my notion about it.”

Davis followed his master from the Lodge; Lucy dried her hands and began attending to something which was cooking on the fire, emitting a great steam and a very savoury smell; and baby continued her happy crowing noise

in the cradle. Lucy's own child was being nursed by a neighbour's little girl, for not being so sweet a temper as the little Stella, he wouldn't submit to be left alone in his cradle, as she was.

The gloom, which had filled the minds of Lucy and Will, had unhappily not yet worn away. Lucy had an heroic spirit, which would have carried her through any great trouble, but she sunk beneath the pressure of small vexations, as so many do. It was so difficult for her to bear with cheerfulness and patience Will's unusual petulance, and the knowledge that he kept a secret from her, than with his having committed some much graver fault.

With the performance of any generous act there comes a feeling of self-satisfaction acting as a stimulus to, and a reward for, the exertion. To forgive her husband for any great wrong done to her, or by any self-sacrifice repair any wrong he might have done to others, Lucy was fully capable; but that passive heroism, which is only seen and rewarded in secret, was beyond her.

In that day when the Judge of all shall make up His jewels, brightly amongst them will gleam those patient, forbearing spirits, who have borne so cheerfully and uncomplainingly, the many minor evils of life — passed silently through this life unnoticed in its glare and

confusion, yet making sunshine in their own homes, patiently putting up with irritating, conflicting tempers, smoothing all difficulties, thinking of every one's troubles but their own, and with increasing perseverance striving to lessen them.

Will was not gone long with his master, he returned soon to his dinner, but was somewhat surprised not to find it ready.

"Why, Lucy, old girl," he said, "where's the dinner, it's late."

"Bother the dinner and every thing else," she answered pettishly; "of course, because I have been out washing, the dinner's spoilt; I can't be everywhere at once, and the soup is burnt, so if you can't eat it you must let it alone: I have been trying this ever so long to take the taste away, but it's no use. I wish I was dead, that I do;" and flinging herself into a chair, Lucy burst into a childish passion of tears.

Now Will had come in in an improved temper himself, for he had been so pleased to see Sir Arthur notice his child, and he hoped some good would come of it for poor Effie's sake; but Lucy flying out like this, as it seemed to him for nothing, put him out again, and he said rather angrily, "I can't think what's come to you, Lucy, you ain't a bit like the jolly little

woman I married, you're for ever mooning about, and getting put out of the way for such trifles ; come, look alive, and dish the dinner, do, the soup won't poison us if it is burnt."

Oh ! the 'soft answer,' why is it not for ever on our tongues ? if Will had spoken gently, soothingly to her,—taken into consideration, that she was tired with a hard morning's work, and that it was trying to have the dinner spoiled,—her ill humour might have vanished, and all would have been well ; but this speech only made Lucy cry more, and although she did do as he ordered her, and serve the dinner, it was with a very ill grace : she ate none herself, and continued to cry during the whole meal, which was certainly not an agreeable accompaniment to a spoilt dinner. Will went out immediately afterwards, saying, he thought he should be late back, and poor little Lucy was left alone to recover herself as she best could.

She felt very wretched, so ill-used ; she thought there never was a little woman who had more just cause to complain than she had. She cleared away the dinner things, nursed her child which the neighbour's girl brought in to her, cleaned up the room, and then took little Stella from the cradle, who had been for some time expressing herself in her own language as tired of remaining there, and sat

with her in her lap for awhile, looking very thoughtful, as though something was brewing in her mind; then as if with a sudden resolution, she started up from her chair, went up with the child into her room, and in a few moments came down with her bonnet and shawl on, the baby also dressed in its walking things, and calling to the little girl aforesaid, to mind the sleeping boy who had changed places with Stella in the cradle, she went out, not into the lane, but quickly along the shrubbery towards the house.

She hurried on to the servants' entrance, and ringing the bell, demanded if Mrs. Copley was within. She was, if Mrs. Davis would step in, they would tell Mrs. Copley she was there; because Mrs. Copley was never intruded on without her august permission. It was granted now, and Lucy with little Stella in her arms was admitted into her presence. In the most comfortable of comfortable rooms well carpeted and curtained, admitting no breath of cold wind, and looking out over the Park, with a peep at the view between the trees; with a famous fire on which a log of wood was sputtering and blazing, throwing a warm red light on the old fashioned furniture, sat the respectable housekeeper of Sir Arthur Atherstone: no one could have felt

otherwise than snug once admitted in the sacred precincts of the Housekeeper's room.

The sight of the kind fat motherly woman, was a welcome in itself, she looked so hospitable and good-natured.

"Why, goodness, Lucy child, I declare the sight of you is good for sore eyes, as the saying is; what has become of you?"

"Why aunt," said Lucy, seating herself, for the chairs in that room seem to invite you to sit down, "I have been so busy I haven't had a minute I could call my own, and I have only run up now to ask you a very great favour, 'cause I am very unhappy."

"Unhappy, you!—why God bless the girl, what's come to her?"

"I'll tell you, Aunt, all about it, only promise you'll do what I ask you."

"You may be sure I will if I can, but go on, for I am curious to know what should make you unhappy—though you are married, and that's enough to make most women miserable—drat the men, I say."

"Well, Aunt dear, you shall hear; I know you won't take Will's part against me, that's why I thought you were the best person to come to. Will last week went to Leighton and never came home till quite late, and then brought a baby with him."

"Mercy on us, a what?"

"A baby, Aunt, for me to take charge of, he said, and be most careful of, only not to ask him any questions about it. Well, I was upset very much at first, but I do love Will dearly, and I thought I ought to trust him, so I said I would,—but Aunt I can't bear it, he's always going to Leighton, and stopping ever so long, and he is so dreadful mysterious about the child, it makes my life miserable."

"I should think so, indeed," said the old lady drawing herself up with great dignity, and smoothing down the folds of her gown.

"Well, Aunt, what I want you to do, is to let me leave the child here—and when Will comes home and finds it gone, I shall see whether—whether he cares any thing particular about it—and I won't tell him what's become of it until he tells me whose it is and all about it; for it is a shame he should have a secret from his wife."

"It is, Lucy, but what can you expect from a man, they're all alike. I told you when you married, you were a silly girl, but you wouldn't be advised; but that's nothing now, that's done and can't be undone, as the saying is: but willing as I am to help you, Lucy, what in the name of fortune am I to do with a baby here?"

"Why, Aunt dear, you understand children

so well, a great deal better than I do, and I am sure you'll manage capitally with it only just for to-night. I'm sure Will will tell me, and I'll come for her in the morning; she's a pretty dear and so good, that I must say," she said, turning the child's face round to Mrs. Copley.

"Bless me, it is a beautiful child, I thought it was your own boy you'd got when you came in first—why dear me," she said, rising and taking the little thing in her arms, "it is the loveliest little creature I ever saw. I used to think Lady Baltimore's last was a beauty; I never thought it would live, that poor child—la! the nights I have set up with it—but this, why it's not to be named in the same day, as the saying is; well I dare say I can manage with it for this one night, what do you feed it with?"

"On biscuit-powder, tops and bottoms, any thing, it eats capitally,—it's a strong little thing."

"Well, my dear, it will be safe with me, depend upon it, but somehow Lucy I don't much like its being such a mysterious child."

"Oh! Aunt," said Lucy, reddening a little, "I'm quite sure it's all quite right, I'm not afraid of that, but I don't like my Will to have a secret from me; I assure you our house isn't like the same since, and I do hope this will make him tell me all about it."

"Dear, dear, what a pretty creature it is to be sure," said Mrs. Copley, as the child remained contentedly in her arms, laughing at and pulling a thick gold chain she wore,— "it makes me sigh when I think," she continued in a lower voice, "how that there might have been a little one here if all had gone right, and Sir Arthur been a happier man."

"Ah! how was it, Aunt,— did Lady Atherstone die?"

"No, no, my dear," said the Housekeeper, shaking her head mysteriously and speaking still lower, "it's a sad story; no one knows it here but me and Miller, and we're bound to secresy; but I only know that my opinion of men has'nt been improved since I came to live in this family — poor dear sweet Lady Atherstone."

"You knew her then, Aunt?"

"Knew her, bless her, of course I did, if you'll never name it out of these walls, I'll shew you her picture."

"I won't say any thing, do show me."

"Take the child then," and giving Stella to Lucy, Mrs. Copley proceeded to unlock an old-fashioned bureau, and from a secret drawer she took a case which opened with a spring, and took from it a cleverly painted and admirable likeness of the beautiful, gentle

Effie, in a gold setting surrounded with brilliants.

“ Oh my, Aunt, that is handsome ! and are they diamonds all round.”

“ Yes, nothing was too good for her when that was taken, and then to think it should ever come to pass that he should say, ‘ take that thing off my table, Mrs. Copley, and let me never see it again.’ I could have said a great deal, but it wasn’t my place, I only cried fit to break my heart, and carried the pretty thing away, and I would not part with it — not for the worth of the diamonds. Bless that child, how it crows at it — mind, mind she don’t break it, Lucy,” she exclaimed, as the child seized hold of it, attracted by the glitter of the jewels.

Oh ! how the original of that sweet picture would have envied her miniature, if she could have known that at that moment its senseless eyes were gazing on her child’s face.

“ And where is she now, Aunt ? ”

“ Ah ! Heaven knows. I wish I did ; but never say, Lucy, that I spoke of her, or showed you this ? ”

“ Did she run away from Sir Arthur ? ”

“ She run away ! — but there, you must not ask any questions, Lucy, I have said more than I should, perhaps now.”

"Well, Aunt, I'm very much obliged for a sight of the picture, I won't say any thing about it — but I must go really now; I am so grateful for your taking the child, I'm sure she'll be good with you, and you know how to manage children, don't you?"

"I should rather think I did," she said proudly.

"Well, good bye, Aunt," and kissing her and the child, Lucy departed.

Mrs. Copley had two dominant feelings, which were so strong, they had almost become principles; one was a hatred of men, and the other, a love of children: the former, she thought she could never sufficiently condemn, nor the latter, sufficiently praise, and she never lost an opportunity of doing one or the other. She prided herself also on her knowledge of both, and was pleased and flattered when she was given credit for it.

All this, sly little Lucy had calculated when she took this strange whim into her head — feeling sure the child could not be in better hands, and that the old Lady would readily enter into a plan which would mildly punish one of that wicked sex she held in such condemnation. I say mildly, for she was far too kind-hearted to wish harm to any one, but the fact of knowing many instances in which

women had been the victims of designing men, had made her thus irate against them, and the concluding case, respecting her young and lovely mistress, had of course confirmed her opinion.

And Will, what had become of him ; Will was gone to Leighton — again to Leighton — tears on the bright face of his little merry Lucy was too much for his philosophy, for though he had spoken pettishly to her at the time, he determined he would restore the smiles if he could, and so he started off at once to ask Effie's permission to reveal to his wife the secret of the child's birth.

Effie, hearing that it was disturbing their domestic peace, consented at once, only begging him to impress on Lucy, the necessity for continued silence. He then told her how Sir Arthur had seen and noticed the child, how he had found him playing with and watching it. Poor Effie heard him with tears of delight, and pressing his hand warmly in hers, thanked him again and again for taking the baby, saying she was ever supported in her separation from it, by the strongest hope that the little Star would yet shine into her husband's heart, and melt it into love and forgiveness.

It was late when Will got home, and he found Lucy watching for him —

"Were you getting frightened about me, old girl," he said, in his usual kind voice.

"I was beginning to wonder what had gone with you, dear, but make haste in, I've got something to tell you so curious,—I've been dying for you to come home," and she busied herself in removing his wraps and settling him in his arm-chair, that he might listen quite at his ease, and then she sat beside him, and began,—

"Do you know, Will dear, I was in rather a naughty humour to-day, and when you were gone I thought I'd play you a trick and punish you for keeping a secret from me."

"Ah!" began Will.

"No, now don't speak till I've done, well, so I took little Stella up to Aunt Copley at the Hall, and asked her to keep the baby all night, that I might frighten you when you came home, and so make you tell me whose child it was—hush! stop a bit—about an hour ago, down comes the under-housemaid with a note for me, and judge my surprise when I read this,—now what does it mean, Will?"—and drawing a three-cornered note from her pocket, she opened and gave it to him: it was as follows—

"Dear Lucy—I have strong and particular

reasons for not wishing this child to return to your care, I wish it to remain here ; I should like to see Will as soon as he comes in, I have no doubt he will tell you all he knows ; if he does, be secret : be sure he comes to me directly he returns.

Your loving Aunt,
JANE COPLEY."

" Oh ! Will dear, what does it all mean," she said, as he finished reading the note, and looked up at her with a smile.

" Well, Lucy, now I'll tell you, it has worried you I know, and I have been unjust and cross with you for being worried ; but I felt nettled 'cause you didn't trust me, but your tears I couldn't stand, and I've been all the way to Leighton to have my promise given me back, and I may tell you, if you'll promise to be secret."

" Oh ! I'll promise any thing, Will," said the little woman, clapping her hands with delight like a child about to hear a Fairy tale, " only do tell me."

" Did you ever know there was a Lady Atherstone ? "

" Yes, I have heard there was."

" Well, Lucy, they had been married only a few months when Sir Arthur found out she

had been a poor cottager's daughter, and that the great lady who brought her up was no relation of hers at all; he's dreadfully proud, and Lucy, do you know, he left her, settled so much a year on her, and left her."

"O Will! Poor creature," said Lucy putting her hand in her husband's, as though to make sure he should not leave her.

"Well, after he'd left her, she went to live with a relation of hers in Leighton, and there her baby was born."

"And it's Lady Atherstone you go to see, and Stella's her baby," said Lucy eagerly.

"Exactly, Lucy."

"But, Will" —

"But why does she part with it? — I'm coming to that; she thought that if the child could be thrown by accident in Sir Arthur's way, without knowing whose it was, he might take a fancy to it, and it might soften his heart to her and make him think of his own — for she wrote to tell him when it was born — and somehow bring them together again. Now, I don't know — but it was a fancy of hers, poor soul, and I could not refuse her. Who do you think she was, — you've heard me speak of little Effie Gray in Devonshire, at my home."

"Yes, to be sure."

"Well, that's her, — isn't it odd how things

do come about?—to think she should be living so near her husband and he not know it, and that I should be his gardener; it seems as though God was planning it out for all to come right, don't it, Lucy?"

"It do indeed, Will,—I am astonished; but then about Aunt Copley, what has she found out?"

"Why that strange mark on its arm, I'll be bound; Lady Atherstone's got one exactly like it. I remember it when she was a child as well as possible. I've often sat and seemed to wonder when you've been undressing it, that you never noticed it, nor asked a question about it."

"Didn't you tell me, I wasn't to ask questions?"

"So I did, Lucy dear, so I did; and now you know all, you'll forgive me, won't you? and I'll make you a promise, and as you know how I can keep one you'll believe me: from this time forth, I'll never have a secret from you again. Between man and wife a secret is like a wedge which keeps their hearts asunder, and that can't be right, so no more of it, Lucy; I'm heartily sorry for it, and it shall never occur again; the woman you can't trust you should'nt marry."

"Dear, dear Will," said his little wife laying

her head on his shoulder, "I'm so happy now, —if I couldn't cry."

"Oh! nonsense, little woman, none of that," he said merrily — "I'll just run up now to Aunt Copley, and then I'll come home and we'll have a brew of elder-wine and a jolly supper in memory of our new resolution, won't we?"

"Yes, dear, you run now and make haste back and I'll have supper ready, I know I can eat some," and giving him a hearty kiss, which he warmly returned, Will hurried off.

It was as he predicted: Mrs. Copley as she held the child in her arms, and the miniature, which it cried for when she attempted to put it away, noticed a strong resemblance between the features of the baby and the picture; then when she undressed it, she perceived the mark of which Will had spoken, and combined with the mystery Lucy told her of, she no longer doubted to whom the child belonged: though how and why Will became possessed of it, of course she could not imagine. But to keep it in the house and attract Sir Arthur's attention to it, and make him love it, and perhaps be reconciled to his wife, was the kind old woman's earnest hope, and would be her unceasing endeavour.

Will was a little puzzled as to whether he might divulge the secret to Mrs. Copley, but

finding her so staunch an advocate for her mistress, and so determined in her own mind, that the little Stella was her child, he thought he might say all he knew.

Greatly was the old dame delighted, but after a very grave consultation they agreed, that Lady Atherstone was not to be made acquainted with the fact that the child was positively beneath its father's roof, until some more favourable circumstances developed themselves, which both Mrs. Copley and Will had every hope of; and these two kind-hearted creatures parted mutually satisfied with each other, and delighted with their plan.

And poor Effie, she, since Will's last visit, had grown more hopeful, more calm; her husband had seen and noticed his child, — surely it had recalled her to his mind, and the remembrance that he was a father — had some strange intuitive feeling drawn his heart towards the little being and made him love it? perhaps it was so, and she hoped on, and the Star seemed ever watching her — the same brilliant Star she had first seen. Often its light appeared so powerful, that she was fain to call Magdalen, and ask her if some luminary was not really lighting the room: be it as it might, its bright rays, though they were but the creation of her own fancy, cheered and encouraged her, and

the partial success of the scheme, which its first appearance had suggested to her, added strength to her hope. She felt that He who made the stars to shine, was in his boundless mercy, thus encouraging, thus supporting her, and she grew more energetic, more active, less despairing and complaining, till even Magdalen gave her credit for greater industry and cheerfulness, and wondered to see the change.

The days passed on, and twice in one week, to the surprise of his establishment, Sir Arthur had invited the Doctor to dinner! Mrs. Copley, anxious as she was that he should see the child, had yet, with a strange anxiety for which she could scarcely account, kept her out of his way.

On the day of the Doctor's second visit, she had ordered one of the servants to take the little creature into the grounds for an airing, and looking out some half hour afterwards, she perceived Sir Arthur sauntering down the shrubbery, and in a second or two the servant turn out of one of the walks with the child in her arms; anxiously she watched, and saw him stop and speak to the girl, and pat the child's face.

"Good gracious," said the old woman, half aloud, "I never told Susan what to say if she met Sir Arthur, I wonder what she will say? —

tell him it's a nurse child of Lucy's and that I have taken a fancy to it, as I've told all the servants, I suppose: but I meant her to have another story for Sir Arthur. However, perhaps it's as well, it would only have made a talk if she'd repeated what I told her in the servants' hall, and I dare say she would, for there's no trusting any one now-a-days. How he does stand and talk to the child, I must have Susan in directly and hear all he's said." She waited with impatience, till Sir Arthur moved away with bowed heart, and then called the girl in.

Slowly Sir Arthur pursued his way down the shrubbery, Don following him closely, with a slow and measured step, as though he must needs be thoughtful because his master was; not scouring in amongst the bushes as was his wont, startling the birds from their nests, and sending the squirrels scampering to the topmost branches of the trees, but walking gravely and sedately in accordance with his master's humour.

They arrived at length before the Lodge, where Lucy stood with her child in her arms, beneath the porch, talking in her old merry tones, first to the baby, and then to a pair of turtle-doves that were cooing in their cage, which Lucy had hung out for awhile to take

advantage of the sunshine, which now grew daily warmer and more powerful.

The sunshine had come back to Lucy's heart as well, and her husband had no longer to complain of the absence of the smile he loved; for the cloud which had come across them, had only made their love and happiness dearer, and they were more than ever determined, that what was so precious to them no trifles should disturb.

It was seldom, unless he had business with her husband, that Sir Arthur spoke to Lucy, but this day he stopped at the gate, and made some remark about the weather, and then said :

"Your little nursling is at the Hall, I perceive."

"Yes, Sir," said Lucy, colouring a little, now she knew all about it, and wondering what next he was going to say.

"Where do its parents live," he asked.

"In Leighton, Sir," stammered Lucy.

"It is very beautiful, the most beautiful child I ever saw. Are its parents poor?"

"Yes, Sir," again Lucy answered, colouring still more at the falsehood she was uttering, but too much frightened to make any other reply.

Whether Sir Arthur perceived her agitation, or had said as much as he wished, he dropped the subject, complimented her on the neatness

of the house and garden, and wishing her "good day," retraced his steps to the house.

Mrs. Copley had only gathered from Susan, that Sir Arthur had admired the child excessively, and that she had told him it was a nurse-child of Lucy's, but to use her own expression — "he had more looked at it like, than said anything."

Mr. Mowbray came at the appointed hour for dinner, and in the course of it, announced to Sir Arthur that Nelly and her husband had that day returned; that she had found him at the first town through which she passed, and her self-devotion had so touched him, that he gave up the notion of enlisting which he had entertained, and returned to the wretched home and scanty fare he had left so selfishly, determined never again to desert his wife, who had evinced so much love for him.

Sir Arthur listened attentively until the Doctor ceased to speak, and then with a slight smile, said —

"You are determined to wage war against my preconceived notions, and insist on my abandoning them."

"I should think it the proudest moment of my life, Sir Arthur, if I could succeed in making you abandon them, and substitute in their place, ideas which would make you a happier ——"

"A better man, Mr. Mowbray,—there is much room for improvement I admit—do not despair, you may do much yet. Already I feel disposed to take a kinder, and I trust a more fair view of human nature through your instrumentality; and if I am not disappointed in this new estimate, I may enlarge it yet further, but happiness," he continued, as the faint smile which had flitted over his face vanished,—
"happiness I despair of.—Another glass of wine, Mr. Mowbray," he said, hastily changing the subject; "I think you have had an arduous day, you look tired."

"I have been about from an early hour, but under the influence of your good cheer, I am recovering wonderfully."

"Do you drive or ride upon your rounds?" asked Sir Arthur.

The little Doctor coloured, as he replied rather hurriedly, "I keep no horse now, my visits do not extend over much ground, and exercise is good for me."

Sir Arthur made no answer, and soon changed the subject to indifferent matters, and the evening passed without further personal allusion.

Since Mowbray's acquaintance with Sir Arthur, an evident change was perceivable in his once pale harassed face, for the spring-water, which through all fatigues, this self-

denying man had continued to drink, was now exchanged for rare old wine; a present from his new friend, which he accepted in the spirit with which it was offered.

“ I am doing the kindest thing to the poor, when I endeavour to keep amongst them their best friend,” were the words of the little note which accompanied the present; “ and for their sake, you must take the medicine I send you.”

And the ‘ medicine ’ had done him infinite good, visible in his brightened eye and firmer step; and a few weeks after the above-mentioned dinner, he was the delighted possessor of a pony-chaise and a pair of ponies, also coming from the same donor: when he spoke of gratitude, Sir Arthur checked him, saying with emphasis, —

“ Do not talk of gratitude to me, Mr. Mowbray, it is I, who ought to be grateful to you.”

A few weeks, as I have said, had passed, and the little Stella remained an inmate of the Housekeeper’s room. One evening, as Sir Arthur was passing the door, his attention was arrested by the notes of a song, uttered it is true by the wiry, feeble voice of Mrs. Copley, and yet causing him to pause and listen eagerly until it ceased — for how often in the happy past had he heard the full, melodious, thrilling voice of

his once darling Effie sing that song—it was his favourite—one, that in the summer twilight, seated at his feet, with her fair head resting on his knee, she had warbled softly to him, alone—one that he had heard her sing when she had been surrounded by people, hanging on each note and applauding her to the echo, and she had turned her sweet dreamy eyes to him, to seek the only praise she cared to have. Strange that he should stand there listening to it now, sung as a lullaby to his own child!

When it ceased, he moved away, but until a late hour of the night he sat before his study fire in deep thought.

Early the next morning, he desired Miller to inform Mrs. Copley that he wished to speak to her, which astounding piece of information was duly carried to the housekeeper's room, and from thence to the servant's hall, where it was discussed for some time, to the abandonment of every thing in the shape of work.

But we may enter Sir Arthur's study, where we shall find the wondering Mrs. Copley seated, by her master's orders, facing him by the fire-side; he, with his eyes fixed upon the flame which is rushing up the chimney—not on her whom he is addressing, speaks in low and interrupted accents.

— “Mrs. Copley, I have seen once or twice,

the — child you have here, — I hear on a visit only, — that it is under the care of your niece." He paused, and Mrs Copley answered hurriedly : —

"Yes, Sir, it is; but I do so love children, pretty dears, and as it is not altogether to say lively here, Sir, I thought, if Lucy would let me, I'd have it a bit, by way of amusement, Sir, but if you object ——"

"On the contrary, Mrs. Copley, it is as you say," he answered with a slight smile, "not very lively here, and my object in sending for you, was to ask if the parents would object to the child changing nurses — and — and you — keep it here, instead of Mrs. Davis."

"Oh! dear no, that they wouldn't," eagerly answered Mrs. Copley, scarcely able to conceal her delight at such unlooked for good-fortune, "I'm sure. I'll go and ask them myself."

"Wait a moment, Mrs. Copley, I must see the Parents myself, upon the subject — if they are poor — your niece tells me they are —" "Heaven forgive her," mentally ejaculated the old lady, — "I should wish to tell them that henceforth the child shall be no expense to them, I will clothe and educate it; but in accordance with its birth, and in the full knowledge of the circumstances of the case. I must trouble you to seek them out, and send them

to me as soon as it is convenient for them to come, one or both, and apprise your niece, that henceforth the child remains under your care. I will not longer detain you."

Too much overcome to speak one word, or offer any reply, Mrs. Copley reverently curtseyed to Sir Arthur, and left the room. Once in her own snug apartment she sat down to think what was to be done. Will Davis had a good heart, though he was a man, she must do him that amount of credit, she must go and consult him: she started off immediately, therefore, without further consideration, and soon found herself, breathless with hurry and excitement, in Lucy's neat parlour.

"Any thing the matter with the child?" was Lucy's first eager question.

"La! no: but give me a chair do, and I'll tell you something—where's Will?"

"Out in our garden, digging potatoes, I think."

"Fetch him then, before I speak another word—and by that time I may have some breath to speak with."

"What, in the name of goodness, have you got to say, Aunt?"

"Go and fetch Will, I tell you."

Away flew Lucy, and soon returned with her husband.

“ Now then Aunt, what is it ? ”

“ Why it’s this, that two heads being better than one, as the saying is, I’ve come to consult Will ; ” and the old lady proceeded to give an account of her interview with Sir Arthur, to her astonished and perplexed listeners.

It was at length decided, that nothing could be done without Effie, and that the whole party should at once set off for Leighton, taking of course, the little Stella to delight her poor mother.

Lucy was in ecstasies, dressed herself and her baby in her best, and sprang into the little tax-cart, with as much glee as any lady ever entered a carriage : but it was no such easy matter to stow into the cart the portly form of Aunt Copley, and some time elapsed ere she was safely inside, and then she continually affirmed, that nothing could ever save her from falling out, and being killed on the spot, and that she felt sure the horse would run away, which poor animal, he would have been greatly puzzled to do with such a load : but they reached Leighton and the Rising Sun at last, and Lucy and her aunt with the children, entered its hospitable parlour, whilst Will went to announce to Effie the news of their arrival, and its object.

He found her at home and alone, Magdalen

was out, — her agitation was great to know that her child was once again so near her, and to hear of the faithful friend she had found in the old housekeeper; but when she heard the object of their visit, poor Effie was as bewildered and perplexed as the others.

“Bring your wife, Mrs. Copley, and my precious child, here at once, if you please, good William, — let me see her dear innocent face, and then may be I shall be better able to consider what course to pursue.”

Will hurried off to the inn, and soon Effie saw nothing, heard nothing, but her child, whom she kissed more fondly, more tenderly, knowing that its little dimpled velvet cheek had been so lately touched by its father. As soon as she could spare a moment from her child, she turned to Mrs. Copley and Lucy, who had been watching her with tears in their eyes, and in sweet earnest accents thanked them for their care of her darling. Lucy's warm heart was won at once, and she was, as she asserted, ready “to go through fire and water to serve her.”

Long was the consultation which ensued, and finally it was proposed that another should be admitted into the conclave; no less a person than Mr. Mowbray, who was so constantly with Sir Arthur, and was, as Will assured Effie, a safe and clever counsellor, and would be able

to tell them probably, if one scheme they had thought of would be likely to be successful.

Will undertook to see him immediately on his return, and let Effie know the decision the next day; then, with Mrs. Copley's earnest assurances that every possible care should be taken of Stella, and how sincerely she hoped and prayed soon to see her dear mistress in her own position, the party set off on their return; poor Effie, partially reconciled to parting with her child, inspired by this fresh hope of reunion both with it and her husband.

Little sleep visited her eyes that night, and more luminously than ever shone the bright Star.

The following day just as the day-light was fading, Mrs. Copley knocked at Sir Arthur's study door, to tell him that the child's mother was at the Lodge, waiting to see him.

"Bring her here," he said, after a short pause, "into this room, I will wait for her here."

"Courage, dear Lady," said the old house-keeper, in a kind cheerful voice, to a trembling form that stood beside her at the study door with her face closely veiled, and her figure enveloped in a large shawl,— "courage, I have no fear all will be well."

She opened the door as she spoke, then

hurried away, closing it after her; and left Effie standing in her husband's presence !

For a moment there was a pause during which Effie could distinctly hear the pulsations of her own heart, when Sir Arthur, pointing to a chair, said, as he fixed a searching glance on her, as though endeavouring to pierce through the veil which concealed her features —

“ You are the child's mother.” Effie moved her head assentingly.

“ Has Mrs. Copley informed you that I wish it to remain under her care so long as you mean to be parted from it, and longer if you have no objection ; that, in short, it should be henceforth no expense to you, but should remain here entirely.”

“ I have heard your kind intention, Sir Arthur,” answered Effie, in a low, very low voice, so low that Sir Arthur bent his head to listen, that he might catch the words more distinctly,—“ but it is the only thing I have left to love, I cannot part with it.”

“ Are you a widow then ?” More eagerly he seemed to await her answer now.

“ My husband is living.”

“ Then you love your child better than your husband ?”

More distinctly came the answer then.

“ I love nothing better than my husband, but my God.”

Sir Arthur started slightly, and said :—" You are mysterious, however, I have no wish to force myself into your confidence. I am to understand that not even for your child's advantage, you will consent to part with it."

" I have heard no offer — forgive me for my seeming rudeness — which tends to my child's advantage."

" Indeed! — not to have it brought up here, and clothed and educated in a manner, which as I understand, you have not the means to do."

" I would rather work, Sir, for my child's daily bread, see her poorly clothed, and knowing nothing but to love and fear the God who made her, than have her live to regret the humble cottage-home she had left for your's. I would rather, passionately as I love her, see her dead, than that she should live to be ashamed of her birth, or weep bitter tears that she was not born a lady, which, beneath your roof, brought up and educated by you, she might forget."

Sir Arthur grew paler and paler, as she spoke, but mastering all emotion, he said. " She should never be deceived on that point, and I assure you her education should be entirely consistent with her birth and the position she is hereafter to maintain. Will you not consent?" he said more eagerly.

There was a sort of convulsive movement in

her chest, and a clasping of her slender fingers round each other before she spoke again, and then she said —

“I have another still stronger objection.”

“Name it at once.”

“I have heard that you — you do not respect the ordinances of our religion, that you do not frequent any place of worship. I could not bear that my child should run the risk of imbibing such opinions.”

She had spoken this in a voice, as though tears impeded her utterance : at the last words, she suddenly threw back her veil, and falling on her knees before her husband, she raised her beautiful streaming eyes to his face, and said :—

“Arthur, I can bear this mummary no longer, you know who is kneeling before you — do not spurn me from you till you have heard me a little longer. The child is yours, mine, my only one, all that has made the long weary months endurable — all that, without you, has made this world endurable — but take her Arthur, she is yours, — I will never see her again, nor trouble you, but be no longer doubtful, but believing. Bring her up in the fear and love of God — of Him, by whose power alone I have been supported since you left me. Many a time, Arthur, should I have put an end to

the existence, which was only a heavy burden, but for the knowledge of the rest and bliss I should forfeit in Heaven. Night and day I have prayed to that Heaven, to send into your heart one ray of its divine light,—with tears, agonising tears. Arthur, tell me before I go, that Heaven has heard me.”

With both her trembling hands, she clasped his, as she repeated, “Arthur beloved! tell me so, tell me that you have learnt to believe in and love God, to respect His righteous laws, and that you will make our child do so, and with a joy which I have not felt since we parted, I will leave this house for ever.”

“Effie, leave me and your child with joy, for ever!” said Sir Arthur, who, since his wife had first revealed herself, stood watching her with a blanched face, and an expression both of sorrow and tenderness.

“Yes, Arthur,” she said, as he raised her from the ground, “because I should then feel sure, that your heart possessed a priceless treasure nothing could take away, and that we might meet to part no more in Heaven.”

“But Effie,” he said, still gazing at her, and holding her hand, with the same sorrowing tenderness, “Love for God and reverence for his laws, would make me feel the necessity to take back the wife of my heart and home—

the wife that before God's altar I had sworn to love and cherish, would it not?—Would not that be the best proof I could give you?"

"That is not for me to say, Arthur," she answered softly.

"My Effie!" he murmured with all the fondness that in happier hours he had often addressed her with,— "and you would go away to your solitary life, and leave your child with me, if you were sure I would pursue that course of life here, which would purchase for me life eternal?"

"Indeed, indeed, I would Arthur. I know nothing you could ask me to do, consistent with my own duty to God, that I would shrink from ; no sacrifice of my happiness here, to secure yours hereafter."

"Then, Effie, the child remains with me," he said: "but," he continued, throwing his arm round her, and straining her to his heart, "not without her angel mother, to teach us both the way to Heaven."

Daylight had faded quite, but one lustrous star was gleaming in the sky. Effie breathless with ecstasy, clung to her husband. She could scarcely believe that she had heard aright, that again she was united to him, never more to part on earth. They were silent for some moments, 'the beating of their own hearts was all

the sound they heard,' and then lifting her face from her husband's shoulder, she said :—

"Arthur, I have wearied Heaven with prayers, that once before I died, I might thus be held to your heart—are you happy to have me here?"

"Indeed, indeed I am, my own wife, and earnestly do I thank you for the patience with which you bore my cruel usage, and the angelic sweetness with which you have pardoned it. The moment you first entered this room, I felt almost assured that it was you,—for I have been drawn so strangely towards the child,—and finding from Mrs. Davis's manner, that there was some mystery about it, I began to suspect, and thought the best method to discover it, was to desire to see the parents."

"And if I had sent some one in my place," she asked, "what would you have done then?"

"Tried some other method, Effie, to discover you,—for some time a thousand new and strange feelings have come over me,—better ones I hope, dear Effie, and I have felt—think how my proud nature is changed, when I own this humbly,—I have felt, that I have been wrong, very wrong, and have deserved to be as miserable as I have been; but it is all over now, Effie darling, and together, with you to assist to teach me, I shall lead a wiser, a

happier life. This very day you shall be introduced to my first instructor."

"Mr. Mowbray?" she asked.

"Yes,—how did you know?"

"I have known every thing concerning you lately, dearest, from good Will Davis."

"He is the culprit, is he," answered Sir Arthur, smiling—"this accounts for his frequent visits to Leighton; and now tell me what induced you to send the child to the Davis's."

"I will tell you some day, but not yet, or you may think me mad; let me first, dear Arthur, assure you, that I was indeed innocent of deceiving you, I understood that you were aware of the humble parentage I sprung from, but was told that by your wish it was never to be named."

"Say no more about it love—it was an act of injudicious kindness, certainly, but my folly was still more unpardonable—let us forget it, or remember it only as a lesson to us both: henceforth there shall be mutual confidence between us, and we will endeavour to instil into the mind of our child, that worth is nobler than birth."

"Yes, dear Arthur, but at the same time, that to remain in the station in which God has placed us must be wisest and best. All this time though, that I am happy, so happy here, dear

Arthur, I am keeping my good Cousin at the Lodge, anxious to know the result of our interview. She has been the kind being who has given me a home in Leighton since we parted."

"Then Effie she shall always find one here. I will send for her."

"Mr. Mowbray is waiting too, dear Arthur."

"He is,—do you know him?"

"Only since yesterday—but all that will do for another time—I have much, so much to tell you—let us send for them both now, that the kind hearts who have sympathised with our sorrow, may rejoice in our happiness."

Who would have recognised the proud, cold, reserved, Sir Arthur Atherstone, as with beaming face, he presided at his dinner-table, his guests, the Parish doctor and the humble Magdalen Gray? Who shall describe the garrulous joy of the Davis's and Mrs. Copley; or the intense happiness of Effie, who with her child in her arms, sat there, once more the mistress of her husband's home.

In that heart which had once been a Desert—where the flowers of hope had withered, where there was no Faith, a Star had risen now, and lighted the way to a fountain of love and mercy, which would refresh and nourish that arid, waste and desert place, making it a

fit home for those fruits of the Spirit ‘ against which there is no law,’ for that wisdom, without which, ‘ be a man never so perfect, he shall be nothing regarded.’

The wife’s supplications had been heard in Heaven—the fervent prayer had been availing : but still it was a work of time, a constant exercise of patience, to make her husband all that she could wish, and to teach him the simple Faith which never doubts or questions, but obeys. Supported as she had been through such afflictions, she never feared now, but patiently continued as she had resolved, to work for her husband, as well as pray for him ; and by example as well as precept, taught him at length ‘ to do justly, to love mercy, and to walk humbly with his God.’

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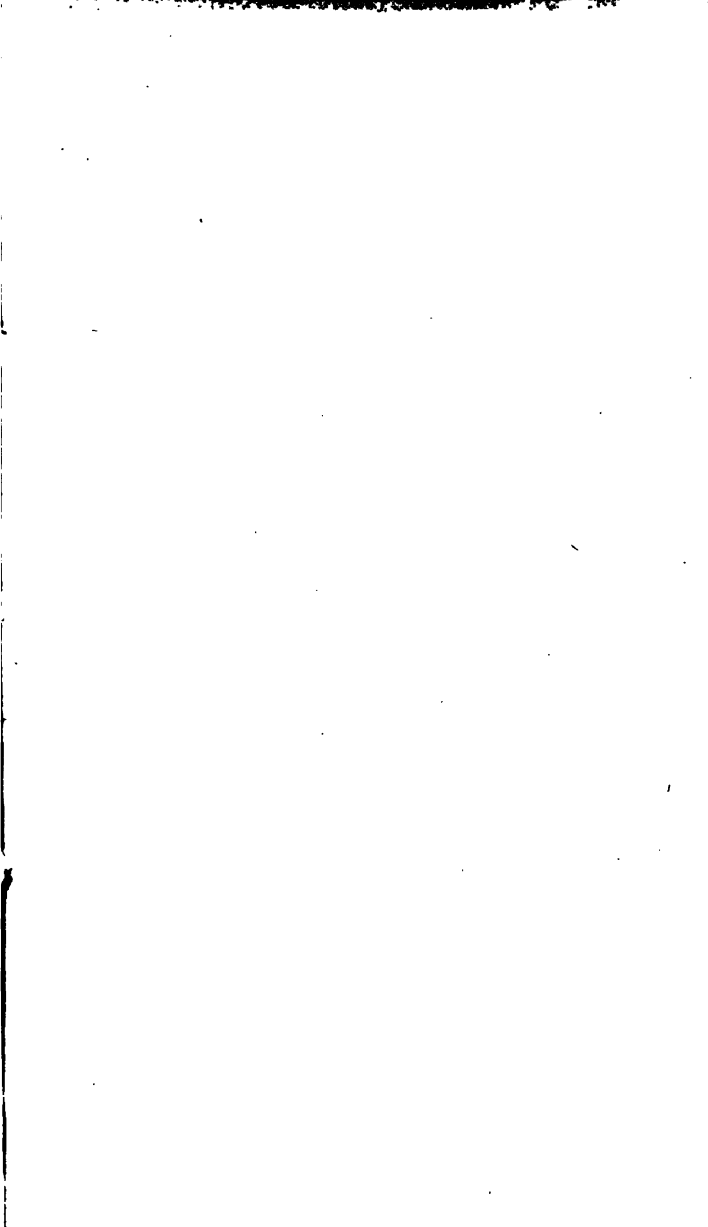
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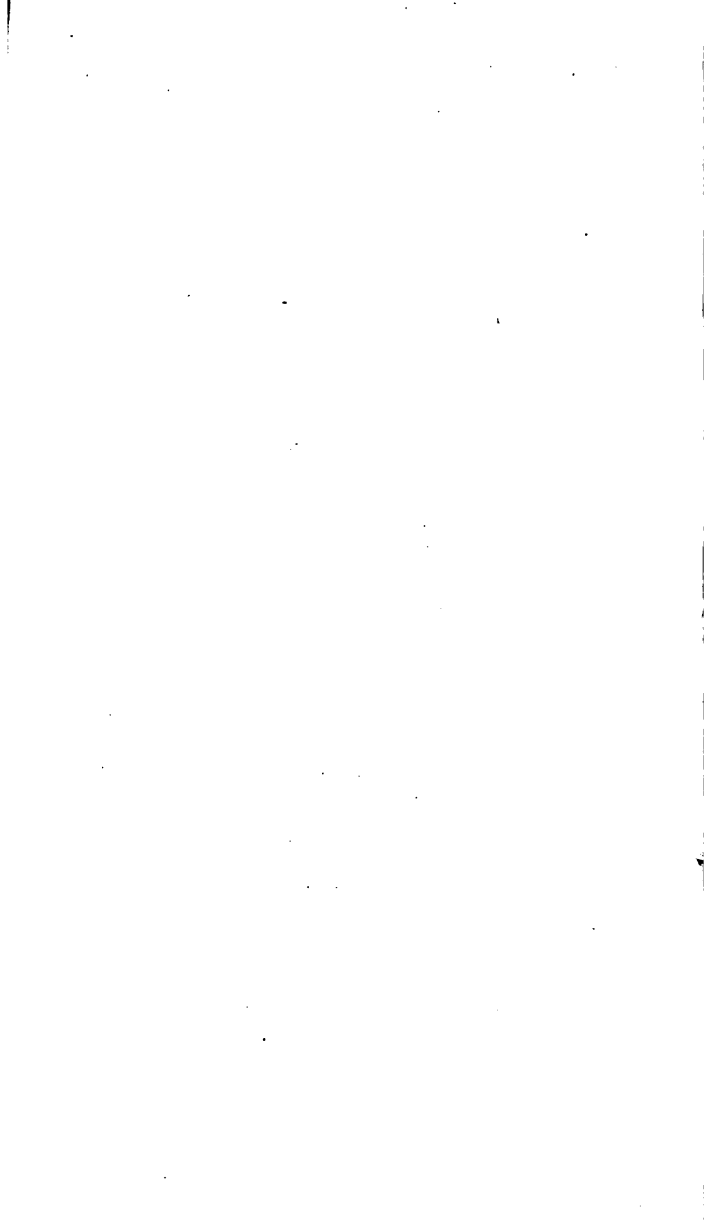
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